

GREAT MOMENTS AT SEA

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Great Moments at
SEA

Commander
A. B. Campbell, R.D.

ILLUSTRATED
BY BRUCE CORNWELL



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

IN recounting events that have happened at sea I have had to refer to some of my other writings. I should like to thank the publishers for permission to reproduce certain information. Among them are Messrs Harrap, Herbert Jenkins, Pitmans. For any inadvertent omissions I tender my apologies.

The story of the *Otranto* is my own experience, since I was the senior officer saved in that tragic disaster.

My father-in-law was Fleet Engineer of H.M.S. *Calliope* when she fought her way out of the harbour at Apia. This account is his story.

A.B.C.

London 1957.

CHAPTER ONE

A REMARKABLE FEAT OF SEAMANSHIP

BREAD-FRUIT is the staple food of the South Sea Islanders. About the size of a large grape-fruit and dark olive in colour, it is baked on hot stones and looks and tastes like newly-made bread. In the late eighteenth century it was suggested that this fruit might prove economical in feeding the natives working on the sugar plantations in the West Indies.

To find out whether these trees could be transplanted and cultivated with success in that part of the world, the *Bounty* was sent out to Otaheite to collect a lot of them and make the experiment. Her commander was Captain Bligh, an officer of ability and energy.

When they arrived at Otaheite, arrangements were made for the crew to live ashore in grass huts, and for six months men who had been cooped up in a ship for weeks lived what was to them an ideal existence. There was plenty of food, the climate was delightful, and the natives were very friendly. During that time they collected over a thousand trees and stowed them in the ship secured in tubs, pots, and boxes.

The job was completed by the middle of April 1789, and Bligh sailed for home the next day. Many friendships had been formed between the natives and the sailors, and some of the crew were sorry to leave.

Most sailors of those times were very ignorant, in fact in the eyes of the law sailors were classed with infants and lunatics. Few could read or write and sometimes it was difficult to find crews for a long voyage. It was not an uncommon practice to scour the jails for likely men and ship

them aboard, and, like many another ship, the *Bounty* numbered some such men among her crew. Captain Bligh was a strict disciplinarian and would brook no nonsense. He knew that a tight hand was necessary to control the men. Some were sick when they joined the ship—Christian the mate was one of them. The ship's surgeon had put the sick men on 'low diet' and this was strictly enforced by Captain Bligh. By some of the ignorant members of the crew he was blamed for this and, among themselves, they accused him of lining his pockets by starving them. The long stay ashore had worked wonders with the health of the crew and Bligh looked forward to a successful run home. He little knew what mischief was brewing in the foc'sle.

The ship had been at sea twenty-four days. She was still in the tropics but a cool breeze tempered the heat, and the sea was calm as the proverbial mill pond. Captain Bligh was taking an afternoon nap in his cabin when he was roused by someone entering. He opened his eyes and saw the mate Christian standing there. Captain Bligh leapt out of his bunk and roared, 'Get out of my cabin at once'.

The mate grinned insolently and, stepping to the door, flung it open saying, 'Make a good job of it, matcs.'

Before Bligh could move three of the crew rushed into the cabin, twisted his arms behind his back, and pinioned them. Captain Bligh struggled violently and called loudly for help, but none came, for the mutineers had locked up all those who were not with them in the conspiracy. At the point of a bayonet Captain Bligh was forced out on deck. To his utter amazement he saw the crew loafing about.

'Get back to your duties at once', he ordered, but the men merely sneered at him.

'You are putting your heads in a noose which will surely hang you', he told them. 'You will . . .'

The mate Christian stepped up to him and, pointing a loaded musket, said, 'Hold your tongue or you will be a dead man.'

'Lower the launch to the water's edge', Christian called, and it was evident he was in full charge, for several of the crew stepped forward eagerly to do his bidding. When this was accomplished he called the crew together.

'Men, the ship is ours', he said. 'The launch is alongside and any of you that is not with us take a pace forward.'

Twenty-two loyal members stepped forward and ranged themselves alongside the captain. Christian gave a rapid glance at them and told four of them to fall in with the mutineers. Turning to the boatswain he said roughly, 'Put some twine, sails, and cordage in the boat and a cask of water.'

Meanwhile Captain Bligh was kept apart closely guarded by two ruffians with loaded muskets. The ship's carpenter asked for his tool chest, and this was put in the launch. A Jacob's ladder was flung over the side and the loyal seamen were forced to climb down it into the boat. When all had been embarked except the captain the mate Christian walked away and returned with the captain's sextant, compass, and log.

'You'd better take these with you, Bligh', he said insolently. 'Make land if you can.'

'If by God's grace I do, then you will hang for this', said Bligh.

Christian's eyes blazed with hate. He stepped up to the captain and struck him savagely across the face. Apart from the cowardice of striking a man whose hands were tied he had committed the worst act of insubordination possible—he had struck his captain.

Bligh turned pale under this insult. 'You cur', was all he said.

All the loyal members of the crew were now huddled in the waiting boat. Christian walked to the side and looked at them. He noted that the gunwale of the boat was almost level with the water, so little freeboard was there. Turning to Bligh, he said:



The rope was unlashd and the boat was
cast adrift.

'Get into the launch with your loyal mates. If you attempt any resistance I'll shoot you like a dog.'

At a signal three men stepped up to Bligh and released his bonds. Slowly he swung his legs over the bulwarks and climbed down the ladder into the waiting boat.

The mutineers were ranged along the ship's side jeering at the unfortunate men in the launch. She was almost water-logged and the men were huddled together in a most uncomfortable fashion. The boat was veered astern by a rope. Some pieces of fat pork were flung into her as she passed the ports. Then the rope was unlashd and she was cast adrift. The ship slowly steered away and as she left the mutineers shouted, 'Hurrah for Otaheite, hurrah for Otaheite', making it quite clear to Bligh what was their destination.

The launch was twenty-three feet long and not quite seven feet wide. Pace this out on your lawn and then see how you can fit nineteen men in it comfortably. Bligh saw at once that the weight in the boat made it dangerous. The slightest swell or movement meant being overwhelmed. Baling would be necessary all the time such a state of things existed, and what a tiring job baling is. Nothing but a succession of calms would allow the boat to keep a direct course.

In silence all in the launch watched the ship disappear below the horizon. Bligh sensed the intense loneliness which fell on all in that boat. He stood up, and taking off his cap said:

'Off caps, men, but remain seated' (to stand would have jeopardized the safety of all). 'We will thank God for our deliverance from those murderous men we have just left. We are indeed in a parlous condition but with God's grace and comfort we will make land. Men, He is always with us, so let us take heart. Amen.'

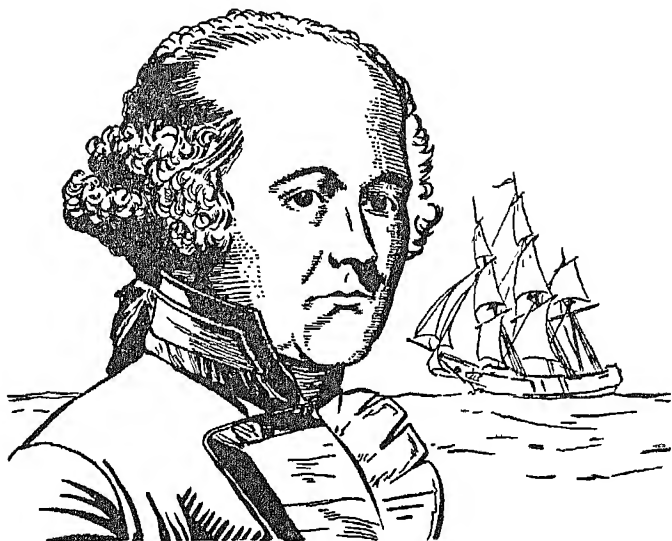
Many of the crew mumbled 'amen'. They recognized that the captain was a man of fine character, religious and humane, and they trusted him in their distress. Bligh

knew that occupation was needed to keep the men fit. He and the carpenter divided them into 'watches', and each watch was told off for a particular job. Then the two took stock of their food supply. The total consisted of one hundred and fifty pounds of ship's biscuits, twenty pounds of salt pork, twenty-eight gallons of water. Not much provender for nineteen men who were in the middle of the largest ocean in the world. Remember, you eat about two pounds of food a day, so work out how much food each day these men could rely on for a voyage of some thousands of miles. Bligh had no idea how long they would be afloat. There was no hope of being picked up by a passing ship, and after due consideration he decided to make for the island of Timor in the Malay Archipelago—a matter of three thousand six hundred miles to the west.

Under these conditions it might be thought that discipline could be somewhat relaxed but this is to underestimate Captain Bligh. Strict naval discipline was to be maintained throughout the voyage under his orders.

The scale of rations was very small indeed, barely sufficient to support life. It amounted to one ounce of bread and a quarter of a pint of water each day. Bligh had no scales but he made an excellent substitute with two half-shells of coconut. For weights the Captain used bullets. The question of fresh water bothered him, so before setting off on the long voyage he decided to call at the near island of Tofoa. But when they arrived there they were unable to get any water, though the natives supplied them with coconuts, bread-fruit, and a few plantains. Perhaps the islanders sensed their visitors' weakness, for as they left they cast volleys of stones at them.

The first night very little sleep was had by anyone. The morning broke with a fiery-red sun—a sure prelude to a gale. The sea rose as the result, no doubt, of a fierce storm elsewhere, and soon ran so high that the sail was becalmed when in the trough of the seas. Waves broke over the small boat, and baling became a continuous perform-



Captain Bligh.

ance. The weather worsened, and it soon became apparent that their food supply was in danger of being damaged by sea water. This would mean starvation for all so it became necessary to lighten the vessel by throwing over the side all superfluous clothes, spare sails, and the heavy contents of the carpenter's chest. However, this chest made an excellent 'pantry' for their biscuits. As by now everyone was drenched to the skin Bligh decided to issue a spoonful of rum apiece. Their dinner consisted of a quarter of bread-fruit each.

The night turned very cold and all suffered from numbed limbs. Bligh had issued fishing lines with instructions that whenever a man was unemployed he must throw a line over the side in the hope of catching a fish.

Regular watches were kept, one half sleeping or resting while the others kept awake. There was no sort of bedding

in the boat and men slept as best they could on the thwarts or the bottom boards with nothing between them and the heavens. Next day it rained steadily, and they managed to quench their thirst for the first time. They also increased their stock of water by thirty-eight gallons, which was desperately needed, for Bligh discovered to his disgust that four of the casks placed in the boat, supposed to contain water, were empty.

Prayers were read by Bligh every morning and evening and he inspected the men for personal cleanliness: he knew that a clean body was half the battle against disease. Daily he gave lessons in navigation to all of them, for he realized that an accident might happen to him. Besides, as he said, 'it keeps them amused'. His cure for lethargy was to start discussions on subjects familiar to them all connected with their seamanship. He made every man strip and wring his clothes out in the cool sea, putting them on while still wet. This was found to be very refreshing in the tropics and to some extent assuaged thirst.

Deep down in his heart Bligh realized that their chances of reaching safety were meagre. As the voyage progressed some of the men showed signs of weakness. He had taken the ship's log with him and he faithfully kept this up, writing in it each day as was his custom on board his ship. After one dreadful night of storm he wrote:

'I now begin to fear that another night such as the last will put an end to the weaker ones. Their distressed conditions show that some are not able to stand much more suffering.'

One morning a booby (a kind of sea bird) alighted on the gunwale. One of the men killed it and was about to skin it when the captain ordered it to be passed to him. The carpenter skinned it, and Bligh divided it into equal pieces. To avoid any suspicion of favouritism he ordered one of the crew to turn and sit with his back to him. He then held up a portion and the man with his back turned

called out the name of one of them and the portion was passed to him. Never did Bligh suggest that as the responsibility of navigating fell on him he deserved special treatment. He fared equally with the crew. That he felt terribly for them is shown by the entries in his log. He wrote that their appearance was growing more ghastly every day. They suffered from hunger and lack of sleep. At times when a tempest was raging the stern and quarters of the boat were under water and in the morning Bligh would issue two spoonfuls of rum to them to revive their spirits.

It was necessary to keep a careful watch on the food supplies. He and the carpenter took stock every week. When Bligh found that there was only enough breadfruit to last twenty-nine days he determined to spread it out to last for six weeks in case he had to make Java instead of Timor.

One afternoon one of the men caught a noddie, which flew low across the boat. This was divided and apportioned by lot, and after the meal Bligh called on them all to join with him in thanking God for his great mercy in sending the bird for their service. That night they heard the sound of breakers. Bligh rejoiced, for he knew that his reckoning had been correct.

It is not easy to take a sight in a large ship; in a small boat it is almost impossible, but Bligh persisted, and next morning he announced that it was the Great Barrier Reef off the eastern shores of Australia (at that time called New Holland). He knew that navigation here was difficult, but he managed to find a break in the reef and that evening they landed on a sandy shore, and gathered oysters and felt much refreshed by them. The carpenter had a tinder box and some brimstone with him and a fire was lighted. They made a kind of stew with the oysters and some bread. Bligh decided to stay ashore another day to give the men a change of diet and from sitting cramped in the boat. He made them eat some palm tops, which took the

place of green vegetables. Fortunately they found a stream of fresh water and were able to fill their casks.

Before re-embarking Bligh held a service and again thanked God for his mercies. In the boat they set off once more. The change had certainly done the crew much good. As if in answer to their prayers a large booby alighted on the gunwale again. This was eaten as usual and then a small atoll was sighted. There was no vegetation, but countless birds were flying over it so Bligh decided to land and see if there were any eggs to be procured. He steered the boat inshore and landed two seamen, who were told to collect as many eggs as they could carry. The men returned with a good supply, which Bligh and the carpenter carefully counted and put in their store of food.

Bligh looked up quickly from his task and out of the corner of his eyes saw one of the men licking his lips. Of course it might have been in expectation of the food which was to follow but Bligh, knowing human nature, thought he had better make sure. He had the fellow searched and two eggs were found concealed under his shirt. Bligh wrote the incident up in his log and added, 'I gave the fellow a good beating.'

Frequent quarrels broke out and one man tried to have a row with Bligh. He said he was just as fine a seaman as the captain. Bligh saw at once that such talk might prove dangerous, 'What's that you say?' he demanded of the man.

The man repeated his remark.

Bligh picked up a cutlass from a pile lying at his feet in the stern sheets. He handed it to the man, who took it rather confusedly. Bligh then drew his own sword from its scabbard.

'Stand up and defend yourself', he said to the man as he stood on guard. 'We'll soon see who is the better man.'

The fellow gave one look at Bligh's determined expression, and his self-assurance collapsed.

'Sorry cap'en, I didn't mean it', he said and touched his forelock.

'Don't let me hear any more of that sort of talk', replied Captain Bligh, and the incident was closed.

Great excitement prevailed next morning. One of the crew hooked a large dolphin. It took three of the men to get it into the boat, possibly because they were so weak from lack of food. Bligh and the carpenter cut the fish up and it was boiled in sea water. It made excellent eating and all were much refreshed by this feast.

But they now began to suffer dreadfully from exposure, the crowded conditions, and lack of exercise. Horrible attacks of cramp assailed them and their cries reached to high heaven. Bligh saw that all were nearing the end of their tether. He wrote in his log:

'I now felt great apprehension for many of the crew. All seemed to be suffering from the effects of starvation and the lack of usual amenities. Most had swelled legs and horrible open sores. It seemed to me by their countenances that several were approaching dissolution.'

He added 'the carpenter told me that he really thought I looked worse than anyone in the boat.'

Surely they must be nearing the end of their terrible sufferings. Bligh never faltered in his belief that God was with him and it was this thought that sustained him. He had never doubted his ability to navigate correctly but lately he had wondered whether his powers were weakening. Could he have passed the island of Timor? His reckonings put him close to the spot. Had he missed it in the night?

To add to his troubles the surgeon and one old seaman seemed to be sinking. He had no medicine chest in the boat so he could give them no assistance but tots of rum. But the terrible strain was telling on them all. All felt a more than common inclination to sleep and several suffered from a complete inability to understand what was said to them. But Bligh's stout heart and his belief in divine assistance sustained him.

Next morning Bligh knew that he was not far from the end of his voyage. He had sighted some small islands. As they neared one of them a seaman captured a bird that was resting on the waves asleep. Bligh took the bird, and said to the crew 'Men, we are nearing Timor and you see that two of our comrades are near death. To the best of my knowledge our voyage will soon be over. Have I your permission to give this bird entirely to our sick?'

Murmurs of assent came from the few who understood his words. He filled a cup with the warm blood and passed it to the surgeon and the old seaman. As the fluid trickled down their throats they seemed to revive. Later he saw them swallow portions of the bird. Neither he nor any member of that brave crew ate a mouthful of it.

Taking a sight the following morning Bligh found they were six miles from Timor. This fine seaman had steered an open boat with no shelter of any kind on a voyage of forty-one days and covered a distance of three thousand six hundred and eighteen miles, and not one man had been lost during that voyage of peril and privation.

The next day they made Coupang Bay. The people saw the boat arriving and hastened down to the shore to receive them. They were not prepared for the sight that met their eyes. Regardless of their pitiable condition these inhabitants carried the men to their houses. Few could walk, their bodies were nothing but skin and bone, and their limbs were covered with loathsome sores. Of course their clothing was in rags, and indeed they resembled nothing more than famished spectres. The people of Timor beheld them with a mixture of horror, surprise, and pity.

With care and attention and good food they speedily recovered. Captain Bligh did not fail to tell how his men had borne their trials with courage. He described them all as heroes.

This is what Bligh said at the termination of this remarkable voyage.

‘When I reflect that with but little to support life we crossed a sea of three thousand six hundred miles without shelter from the inclemency of the weather and none of us was taken with disease I say it was indeed God’s great mercy.’

Arriving in England, Captain Bligh was promoted and sent to sea again. He was in command of H.M.S. *Glatton* at the Battle of Copenhagen and was mentioned by Lord Nelson, his admiral. Eventually he was made Governor of New South Wales.

The Admiralty sent H.M.S. *Pandora* to apprehend as many as possible of the mutineers who seized the *Bounty* and bring them home to England for trial. Fourteen of them were captured but four of them were drowned when the *Pandora* was wrecked off the coast of Australia. The remainder were carried to England and arrived at Spithead in June 1792. They were at once put on trial and the three ringleaders were hanged.

Many years later it was discovered that one of the mutineers was still alive and living on the lonely island of Pitcairn. Two English frigates were cruising in the Pacific when this island was sighted. As it was not marked on their charts they concluded they had discovered it, but when they examined it next morning they perceived some huts, and crops growing. Then a small boat put off from shore and paddled to the ship’s side. In it was a young man, and their astonishment may be imagined when he hailed them in English with ‘Heave us a rope, please’.

Once on board he explained that he was the son of the mate Christian and was born on the island.

This is a true account of one of the finest acts of seamanship ever recorded. The log of Captain Bligh is today kept at Deptford Dockyard. I was privileged to search it for this story.

CHAPTER TWO

FIRE!

It was the time of the Indian Mutiny, and more and more troops were being sent out to India to quell the rising. Among the ships requisitioned for this purpose in 1857 was the transport *Sarah Sands*, an iron-built ship of some 2,000 tons, part sail and part steam. Actually she only used her engines when leaving or entering harbour. If she were becalmed in the Indian Ocean she might stoke up and steam for a few hundred miles, but this was mostly to get a draught of air through the ship for the comfort of the passengers.

On this particular voyage she was carrying a large proportion of the 54th Regiment of Foot under the command of Lieut.-Col. Moffatt. Among the four hundred passengers were wives and children. Captain Castle was in command of the ship and the complement consisted of eighty-five men. So altogether there were nearly five hundred souls on board.

She had a good run down channel, crossed the dreaded Bay of Biscay, and, passing St Helena and Ascension Island, rounded the Cape of Good Hope and set off across the Indian Ocean. She ran direct into the north-east monsoon, but as this is not nearly so strong as the south-west one, she hardly felt it. At mid-day on 11 November the officer of the watch took her position and found she was four hundred miles south-west of the island of Mauritius.

The officer congratulated himself on the good passage the ship was making. He looked along the decks and saw some of the children playing, while their mothers slept peacefully in deck chairs. Yet he seemed to sense danger.

Was it premonition? He walked into the chart room and almost unconsciously made a mental note of the ship's position. Then an unusual noise caught his ear. It was the sound of a man running along the wooden deck. He stepped out of the chart room and was almost knocked down by a sailor who, without a salute or a 'sir', whispered something in the ear of the officer.

It was clear the information was startling, for the officer turned pale beneath his tan.

'Are you quite sure?' he asked the man.

'No doubt at all, sir', replied the man. 'I saw smoke seeping through the hatch covers and the hatch coaming is hot to the touch.'

The officer turned to the helmsman. 'Keep her steady on her course', he ordered and swung quickly down the companionway leading to the captain's cabin. That officer was taking a 'watch below', as the sailor calls an afternoon nap. Like all seamen the captain was a light sleeper and almost before the officer rapped on his door the captain had called 'Come in'.

As soon as he saw the look on the officer's face the captain sprang from his bunk and began pulling on his clothes. He knew that something very serious was to hand.

'What's wrong, Jones? You look frightened to death.'

'The cargo in number three hold is on fire.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes, sir. I ran along there and saw smoke coming through the covers. I couldn't put my bare hand on the coaming of the hatch.'

Captain Castle was a brave man but a spasm of fear crossed his face. He had in his charge many lives, a fine ship, and a valuable cargo. It was indeed a responsibility for one man to carry.

'Ask Colonel Moffatt to come to my cabin at once', he ordered. The officer made off to obey. Soon he and Colonel Moffatt were walking briskly toward the bridge.

Captain Castle was waiting for them. 'Come in

Colonel', he said. Soon the two went aft to the hatch and examined the conditions. Yes, there could be no doubt about it. Thick smoke was creeping through the crevices of the hatch covers and the coaming was too hot to touch with the naked hand.

'Are your troops seasoned soldiers, Colonel?' asked the captain.

'Yes, and splendid fellows too. They are all picked men.'

'I may have to call on them to lend a hand with my crew if that fire has gained much of a hold.' He turned to the boatswain who stood just behind him.

'Call all hands and send one watch aloft to take in sail.'

'Aye, aye, sir. Clear lower deck', the boatswain yelled, after he had blown a shrill blast on his pipe.

The hands came tumbling up from below. What on earth was the matter? The officer ordered one watch aloft and the others to the burning hatch. The captain was in a dilemma. If he opened up the hatch and air got to the fire it might fan it into flames. He had ordered sail to be taken in to lessen the rush of air. While he was considering what action to take the Colonel whispered in his ear.

'All our stores are stowed in that hatch, Captain, and among them is a large amount of ammunition.'

'My God! Then we must get at the fire as quickly as possible. Keep this from the passengers.'

'Some of the troops that assisted in the stowage must know about it.'

'Then order them to keep that information to themselves, Colonel.'

Carefully the men removed the hatch coverings. Then one of the gratings was lifted. As soon as the air reached the smouldering cargo it was evident that the fire was well away. Fierce flames rose from below, driving the crew from the hatch. Hose pipes were brought from the fire engine and soon torrents of water were pouring into the blazing hold. The water seemed to do very little



In the inferno men passed the barrels of gunpowder from hand to hand.

towards stopping the blaze. At any moment there might be a brilliant flash, a tremendous roar, and all would be over.

By this time the soldiers were crowding in on the crew. The women and children had been shepherded forward out of the way of the fire fighters. Some of the soldiers were evidently anxious to help but could take no action until told to do so.

'I think you'd better let the soldiers lend a hand, Captain', said the colonel.

'Thank you, will you tell them the state of affairs?'

The colonel stepped towards the ranks of men. He held his hand up for silence. 'Men, the ship is in very great danger. Some of you are aware that in that burning hold is over four tons of high explosives. I am going to call for

volunteers to go down with me and get at the two ammunition magazines and pass the barrels of gunpowder up on deck to be thrown overboard before fire gets at it. Will those men who are ready to risk their lives with me take a pace forward?’

Every man who heard him stepped briskly forward. There was a slight hesitation on the part of two officers and a sergeant. They had been talking together and one of the officers stepped up, saluted, and said,

‘Sir, it is the wish of all of us that you remain on deck.’

Captain Castle heard this proposal and heartily agreed with it. So the colonel reluctantly consented to keep out of the hold.

Men were told off to descend into the inferno and pass the barrels of gunpowder up by hand to be thrown overboard. The starboard magazine was not in immediate danger but the one on the port side was already smothered in smoke and getting very hot. The barrels had actually to be passed quickly through the flames before they could be hauled on deck. But the soldiers did not falter. Several were overcome with the heat and collapsed and had themselves to be hauled on deck. But as soon as they revived in the fresh air, down they went again to assist their comrades.

Unfortunately as the fire progressed the wind began to rise. It may have been that the hot air rising from the hold gave room, as it ascended, for the cool air to rush in and take its place, so that those on deck found themselves in a small local hurricane. The surrounding sea did not seem to be much affected.

The women and children who had been sent on to the foc’sle-head were getting very uncomfortable. Fear and hunger assailed them and none of the fire-fighters had time to go forward to reassure them. It soon became evident that the fire was spreading down below. Some of the passenger cabins burst into flames, and clouds of black smoke rose from the saloon. Suddenly the colonel re-

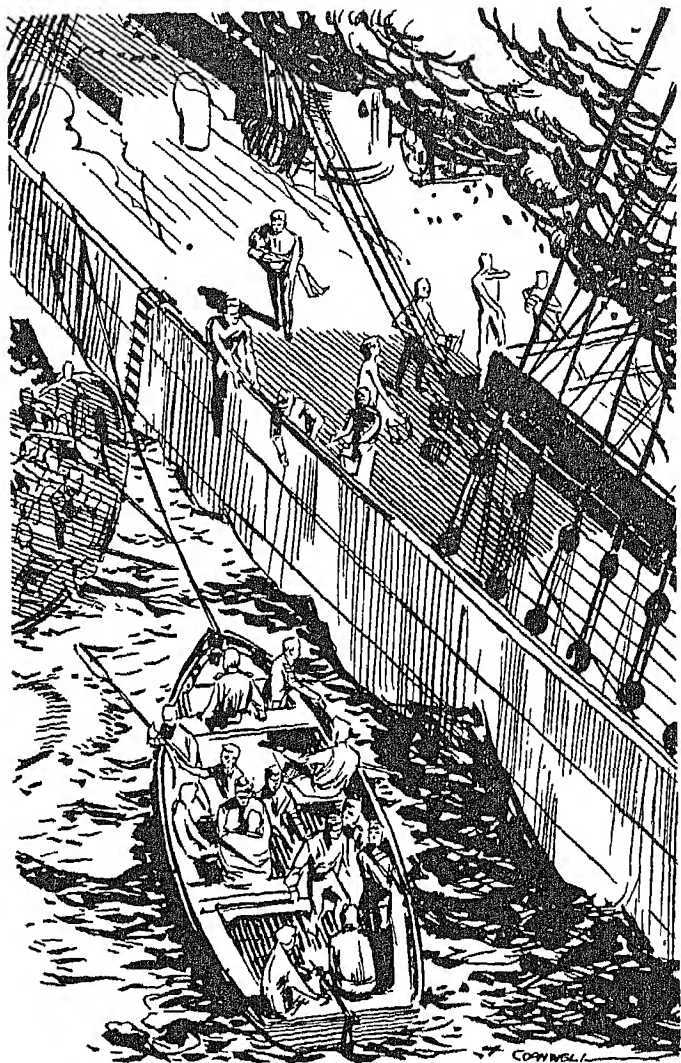
remembered that the Colours were stowed in the after end of the saloon. He ran to the companion-way and was met with a burst of hot, black smoke. A quartermaster just managed to hold him as he slipped. 'Let go', cried the colonel wrenching himself free. 'The Colours, the Colours.'

The man without a moment's hesitation ran past the colonel and dashed through the smoke and heat into the saloon. In a few moments he was back with the Queen's Colours in his hand. He passed them to the colonel, then fell fainting at his feet. Another sergeant who was standing by brought water and soon the fainting man recovered. Then he remembered he had brought up only the Queen's Colours—the Regimental ones were still in the blazing saloon. Before they could stop him he dashed into the saloon again and brought up the Regimental Colours, which were actually scorched by flames.

The crew and the soldiers worked like demons but it slowly became evident that the fire was gaining on them. Flames were now spurting up between the deck planks, and Captain Castle began to fear for the safety of his charges. Leaving the fire-fighting in the hands of the colonel, he called his boatswain and ordered him to take a watch with him and lower the lifeboats. Soon all the boats were at the ship's rail. The captain gave the order 'Women and children first into the boats.'

Carefully they were placed in the lifeboats and lowered to the water's edge. Many of the children were in tears at having to leave their toys in the cabins, but these were already ablaze. A nasty sea surrounded the ship and soon the boats began to toss and twist. The motion of a small boat at sea is very different from that of a large ship, and although most of the women and children had got their 'sea legs', the new motion speedily upset them and they were horribly seasick.

The colonel and captain now decided to fill the remaining boats with those of the workers who were in-



A nasty sea surrounded the ship, and soon the boats began to toss and twist.

capacitated. Many were lying on deck too exhausted to speak, or to be of further use to the fire-fighters. The fire had now grown so fierce that it seemed that any moment the *Sarah Sands* would blow up, which would mean certain death to all on board. It might be possible for some to get away in the remaining boats but the captain feared there might be a mad rush caused by panic. He need not have worried.

With calmness and dignity the soldiers marched to the ship's rail and climbed into the boats. They showed no more alarm than if they had been on their barrack square. When the boats were filled the captain gave orders they were to pull away and await further instructions. All the boats were now full and away—and there were still about two hundred men left in the ship. Today such a thing could not happen. Before a ship sails she must have a 'clearance' and this will not be given unless it can be shown that she has enough lifeboats to carry all on board in case of need.

Some of the carpenter's crew were told off to construct rafts in case the ship suddenly foundered. The fire had made terrible progress. The whole of the cabins and saloon were burning fiercely and, as darkness fell, the glare lighted the sea in a circle of at least a hundred yards' radius. The people in the open boats must have watched the gruesome sight with horror and pity. Suddenly a very fierce blast caused flames to burst through the deck and set fire to the mizzen rigging. This must be saved at any cost, for the engine room was damaged beyond hope of repair and if they beat the fire they would have to make port by sail only.

Sailors swarmed up the rigging and buckets of water were passed from hand to hand. Several men fell from the rigging exhausted but none was severely injured. Then a more dreadful disaster overtook the unfortunate ship. Some barrels of gunpowder that could not be carried from the port magazine exploded. When attempts were

made to see the extent of the damage it was found that the whole of the port side aft was blown out. Here the craftsmanship of the shipbuilders proved itself. Though badly damaged the vessel still remained on an even keel. There was only an iron bulkhead dividing the forward from the after part of the ship. This had withstood the fury of the fire and it now took the shock of the explosion. It stood firm.

Captain Castle saw that this bulkhead might be the means of saving his ship. The bulkhead was very hot and men were told off to pour buckets of water on to it in an effort to cool it. Then the main rigging caught fire. It was impossible to form a chain of buckets to handle it, so the men were given blankets soaked in water to try to stifle the flames. Here again courage and devotion to duty won through. When the fires were doused the occupants of the boats gave their comrades a rousing cheer.

The watchers had cheered too soon. Flames leapt up again and once more the men set about their tremendous efforts. As night wore on the people in the boats huddled together for warmth. Most of them had fallen into a fitful slumber, when they were aroused by loud cheers. The fire was getting duller and duller before their eyes. The men had won. They had performed the seemingly impossible. Almost breathless with doubt and fear the people in the waiting boats watched for the yellow spurt which would tell them that the demon fire was not yet conquered. It did not come, and as dawn broke, they saw a signal from the ship recalling all boats.

With great care the women and children were taken on board. They found the ship was a mere shell. The fire had been defeated but the ship was rolling helplessly in the trough of the sea. Crashes down below told that the water tanks had got loose and were careering from side to side as the ship rolled. At any moment one might crash through the weakened hull.

On a tour of inspection of the damage the captain

found that the after end was almost falling away from the rest of the hull. He decided to attempt a ticklish job—that of passing a large hawser round her stern to hold the vessel together. Crawling along the charred deck, which at any moment might cave in and hurl them into the depths, men carried the hawser along. Every time the ship rolled she went so far that all wondered whether she would turn turtle or right herself, but they stuck to their task and at last it was completed—the stern was lashed on to the hull, and held together by the stout hawser.

Meanwhile men had been lowered into the pitch-dark bilges. With the water up to their armpits they struggled with the heavy loose tanks. Had one of them been caught by a tank he would have been crushed to death. But they fought on and with crowbars and wooden chocks at last managed to secure all of them. Other hands had been at the pumps and baling. The terrible hole in her side caused by the explosion was patched by passing an old sail over it. To get this into position men had to jump overboard and work in the rough seas, for all hoisting tackle had been destroyed by the fire. It was thirty-six hours since the outbreak and during the whole of that time the crew had all worked like supermen. The captain decided to set sail and put her on a course for Mauritius. A favourable wind sprang up and the crippled ship began to make way. Eight days later the people in Mauritius saw a strange sight. What was little better than a battered, burnt-out wreck was limping into harbour!

This achievement is without parallel in nautical history. Not a single life was lost. The key point was the iron bulkhead. Had that given way all would have been over. But this alone had not saved the ship. The strong bulkhead would have been of little avail had not discipline, courage, and resolution been shown by all on board.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GREAT SEA MYSTERY

ONE day in December 1872 there sailed into Gibraltar an American cargo boat manned by a prize crew. She was in charge of a man named Black, the mate of another American cargo boat, the *Dei Gratia*, who refused to tell the officials who boarded the vessel anything about it. What had become of her original crew? Since she did not appear to be damaged how did she come to be in need of rescue? To all questions Black replied that the captain of the *Dei Gratia* would be along to tell the story.

This was the beginning, as far as the world was concerned, of one of the strangest mysteries in the history of the sea—a mystery which became the principal topic in the newspapers and clubs all over the globe. For, when Captain Moorhouse of the *Dei Gratia* arrived the next day, this is the extraordinary story he told to the captain of the port.

On the 4 December 1872 the S.S. *Dei Gratia* was making her way across the North Atlantic Ocean. She was forty-seven days out from New York and was about half-way between the Azores and the coast of Portugal. It was a lovely bright day with just enough breeze to fill the sails. All was peace and quiet when two clangs on the bell rang out, and the man on the look-out shouted:

‘Ship on the port bow!’

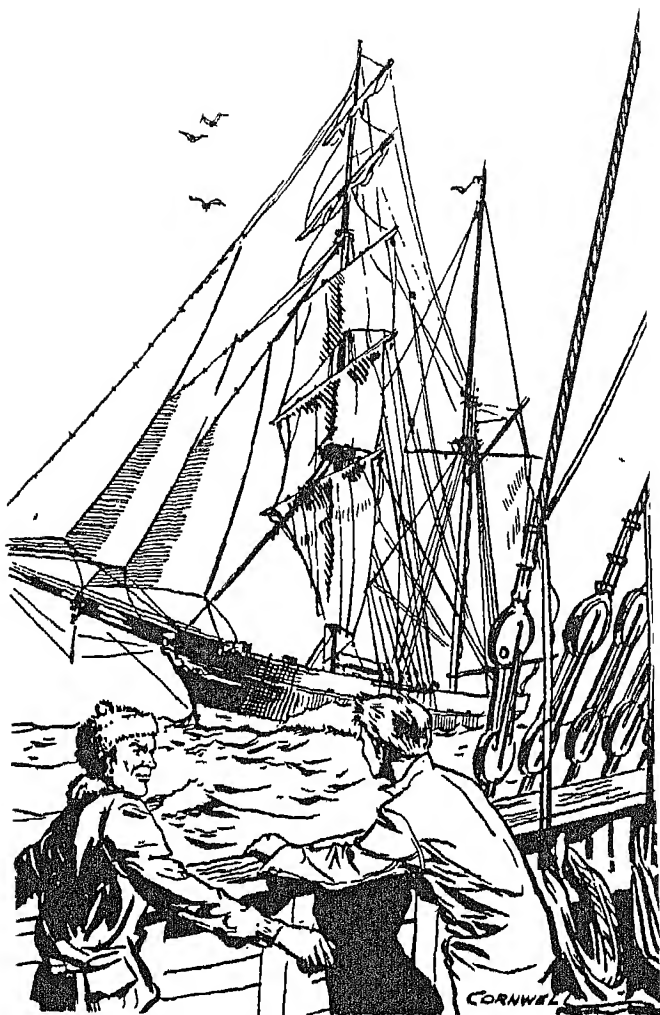
Captain Moorhouse picked up his telescope and took a look at her. As he watched it struck him that she was behaving strangely. He gave an order to the helmsman and changed course to get nearer to her. He was much concerned, for according to him ‘she was swaggering all over the place’. And further, as he closed with her, he could

not see the helmsman, or the look-out—in fact the deck was deserted. He was now close enough to make out her name—*Marie Celeste*—and to give her a hail, but no answering call came from her. Her condition was remarkable. She was on the port tack but her sails were set for a starboard course, her yards were aback. No master would let his ship be in that state unless he was very drunk or mad. Something was very wrong, and Moorhouse decided to find out what it was. He hove to and called to Mr Black the mate. ‘Mister Mate, lower the boat and take a couple of hands across with you. See what’s wrong over there.’

Soon the boat was in the water and the mate was being rowed over to the strange ship. No gangway was lowered as the boat approached, nor was there any sign of life. Ropes were hanging over the side so Black swarmed up, telling one of the hands to follow him. There was not a soul about. Then a dreadful thought struck the mate—perhaps the ship was a ‘plaguer’. Perhaps one of her crew had brought cholera on board and the crew had contracted it. One by one they had died and been thrown overboard. Perhaps some were still lying helpless in their bunks.

The mate and the man crept below and peered into the crew’s quarters, expecting to see a cholera-stricken corpse lying in a bunk or stretched dead on the deck. Once they stopped in horror as they thought they heard the groans of dying men, but it proved to be the rubbing of the cordage in the wind.

After careful search from stem to stern they found not a living soul on board. In the saloon was a sewing machine with a child’s pinafore in course of being made. There was a bright fire burning in the for’ard galley and some cups filled with cocoa—still warm. Three shirts were hanging on a line on the foc’sle and they were still wet. What had happened? There was a chicken cooking on the stove and the deck-hand wanted to eat it, but Black



'Mister Mate, see what's wrong over there.'

still had suspicions of plague and threw the pot and its contents over the side. He could find no trace of the ship's chronometer or the Log Book. In the wheel-house he found the 'Slate Log', a slate kept ready for daily entries which were transferred to the Log every night. The last entry on the Slate had been made ten days ago.

Leaving one hand on board he and the other rowed back to the *Dei Gratia*. As soon as Captain Moorhouse heard the strange story, he saw that there was money to be made from salvaging the deserted craft. He sent Black over to the ship with a prize crew and instructed him to make for Gibraltar. He was to avoid shifting gear more than he could help, and not to talk to anyone about the vessel until his captain had arrived and made his statement.

The captain of the port called on the Admiralty representative and all three went aboard the strange ship.

The search began. The Admiralty official was most intrigued. He seemed to have a vivid imagination and more romance than commonsense in his make-up. He found one of the hatch covers had been removed. On the deck just beneath there was a dark stain. Nearby he found a blood-stained sword. Here was the solution. Mutiny and murder were the words conjured up by his discoveries. A great crime had been committed.

On shore he spread his theories both at home and abroad. The Liverpool papers got wind of this remarkable story and gave it prominence. Headlines read 'DESERTED SHIP FOUND IN MID-OCEAN. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CREW? WIFE AND CHILD MURDERED OR DROWNED?' A number of well-known writers offered explanations of the mystery. Here are a few of the suggestions. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote:

'The captain of the *Marie Celeste* had on board his wife and child. The child was a great favourite with all on board and to please her the ship's carpenter had rigged a small platform beneath the bowsprit, and on fine days the

little girl could sit there and watch the porpoises and flying fish play round the ship. Apparently the strain of having his wife and child in the ship preyed on the captain's mind and he became morose and moody. He readily quarrelled with anyone. One day an argument arose with the mate as to who was the better swimmer. The captain challenged the mate to race him round the ship fully clothed. The mate protested but the captain insisted. Mrs Briggs, his wife, was very distressed and asked two of the hands to strip and swim round with the contestants, for her husband had been far from well the last few days. Overboard went the rivals, followed by the two deck hands. The platform built for the little girl was the ideal place to watch the swimmers round the ship. Consequently all left on board very soon crowded on to this. When excitement was at its highest an ominous crack was heard and before anyone could clamber back on deck the whole contraption was hurled into the sea with everyone on it.'

Does this sound feasible?

Another version widely believed was that the crew broached the cargo of alcohol which was being carried to the port of Genoa. All on board got drunk and the captain, in a fit of delirium, came on deck with a loaded revolver and at the point of the gun ordered everybody to jump overboard. When he was the last one left he sprang onto the bulwark and blew his brains out, falling into the sea.

This account is too silly to be worth a moment's consideration but here is another suggestion which has the merit of being just possible. One morning the cry of 'Fire' put the fear of God into the crew. They knew the cargo consisted of highly inflammable materials so speedily took to the open boats. From afar they watched the smoke and flames seem to envelop the ship. Then to their amazement the conflagration died down. They made every effort to regain the ship but a breeze sprang up, filled the sails, and away she sped leaving them to their fate.

Just possible, but extremely unlikely.

These, then, are some of the wild tales that have been put forward to solve the greatest marine mystery of all times. What is the real answer?

When I first went to sea, more years ago than I care to remember, there was an old boatswain in the ship who had been at sea for fifty years. He was a quiet man and a fine seaman. One evening when we were yarning on the foc'sle one of the younger men mentioned the story of the *Marie Celeste* and told one of the tales I've quoted as an explanation of the mystery. When he'd finished old Pyke the boatswain took his pipe out of his mouth and said, 'Sonny, do you believe all that rubbish?'

'Of course', replied the youngster somewhat nettled. 'Do you know a better explanation?'

'Anyone who believes all the rot that has been said about that ship ought to be in the Loony Bin', replied Pyke.

At once an argument started, though Pyke would take no part in it. But I fancied he knew more than he would say, so one day I asked him about it point blank. This is the story he told and I believe it is the true solution to the mystery. It would take too long to tell the tale in his own way but here is the gist of it.

When he first went to sea he joined a ship sailing out of Southampton. On sailing day one of the cooks became ill and was taken to hospital. The captain didn't want to sail with a cook short, so sent the chief steward to the shipping office to see if he could pick up another. In a short time he returned with a man in tow. He saw the fellow come up the gangway and thought he looked a bit sheepish.

For the first two weeks the new hand kept very much to himself. One day Pyke saw that he looked miserable and lonely, so went over and spoke to him as he sat smoking on the step of his galley.

'Hullo, Cooky', he said. 'You look as if you had all the trouble in the world on your shoulders.'

'Sometimes them as goes to sea learns queer things', the other man muttered.

He lapsed into silence but Pyke was determined to make him a bit sociable. He asked,

'What was your last ship, Cooky?'

'I was cook of the *Mary Sellars*', he replied.

'Never heard of her', said Pyke.

'No, she belonged to New York.'

Conversation seemed to languish, so Pyke cleared off. When the ship arrived at Rio the British papers came aboard. They all gave an account of an extraordinary incident about a ship being picked up in the North Atlantic quite deserted and taken into Gibraltar. Pyke read the tale and somehow the name of the ship had a familiar ring. He repeated the name several times. '*Marie Celeste*, *Marie Celeste*.' Where had he heard that name recently? Then he recollected Cooky's last ship. It had a similar sound. 'The *Mary Sellars*, the *Mary Sellers*.' He went along to the galley and called Cooky,

'What did you say was the name of your last ship?' he asked.

Cooky repeated the name *Mary Sellars*.

'I suppose it doesn't happen to be that mystery ship that is in all the papers, the *Marie Celeste*?'

The cook look startled. Then he said surlily:

'What if it was? Her name was the *Mary Sellars* but some fool Frenchman in New York painted her in dock, and slapped paint all over the name on the bows. When he came to putting the name on again he forgot what it was. He called to someone on deck "What ces the nom of this ship?"'

'"*Mary Sellars*"', the man yelled, and *Marie Celeste* was the best he could do with it. When the captain saw the new name he said it would do just as well—in fact he preferred it.'

'What about the mystery,' continued Pyke, 'do you know anything about that?'

Pemberton, for that was the name of the cook, lapsed into silence. Pyke put another question to him. 'What *was* the name of your last ship? It couldn't have been the *Marie Celeste* for she's in Gibraltar.'

'I was paid off from the *Dei Gratia*.'

'How did you get aboard her then?' persisted Pyke.

'That 'ud be telling', said Pemberton.

It was clear that he would get no more out of the cook then, so Pyke left him. The next night Pyke was smoking on the after hatch when Pemberton came and sat next to him.

'Mister', he said, 'would you like to hear something more about the *Mary Sellars*?'

'If you'd like to tell me', responded Pyke.

'She was a real hoodoo ship if ever there was onc.'

'How do you mean?'

'She ran into trouble from the day she left New York. If it wasn't the weather, it was the crew. But I'll start at the beginning.'

'In New York she was lying alongside the *Dei Gratia*. The two captains became very friendly like. Used to visit each other and get drunk together. I had to carry their liquor when they was drinking and I couldn't help hearing bits of their talk. When they'd had a few they was always quarrelling.'

Pemberton took a long pull at his pipe, then went on:

'One night they was very matey. The Captain of the *Dei Gratia*, who was called Moorhouse, said to Captain Briggs, who was our skipper:

'“Do you expect to keep on freighting up and down this coast all your life, Briggs?”'

'“I suppose so”, said Briggs.

'“There's no money in it, old man.”'

'“Not much certainly, but it's a living.”'

'“There's other ways of making it.”'

'“Whatcher mean”, mumbled Briggs who was getting fuddled.

' "There's lots of money in a salvage job, old man."

' "Yes, but you've got to be mighty lucky to pick one up", said Briggs.

' "Well, if you're not lucky you might be clever, eh?"

' "And do what?"

' "You and I might arrange one", says Moorhouse, giving Briggs a funny sort of a look. When Briggs cottoned on to his meaning he flew into a rage. I got out of the way for I didn't want to be mixed up in their row. Soon after Moorhouse left, I heard him call, "Think it over Briggs when you're sober."

' Next morning Moorhouse came along the wharf and up the gangway. He wanted to know if Briggs had thought it over, I daresay. He rapped on the door of his cabin and walked in. Briggs was "taking a hair out of the tail of the dog that bit him"—drinking more whisky, see. He looked up as Moorhouse came in.

' "Come and join me. What brings you over so early?"

' "Did you think over what we were talking about last evening, Briggs?" he asked.

' "That get-rich-quick scheme of yours?"

' "Yes."

' "Well, let's hear how you propose to do it."

' "That's more like it!" says Moorhouse.

' They sat down over another bottle of whisky and laid their plans.

' Briggs had picked up a cargo for Europe of barrels of alcohol. It was lying on the wharf; men seemed to fight shy of shipping in the *Marie Celeste*. She had a bad name. The people who had sent the cargo were getting fed up at the delay and clamouring for delivery in Europe, and Moorhouse knew it. After a few minutes he asked:

' "What sort of a man is your mate? I haven't seen him about the ship."

' "Oh, Hullock. He's all right when we get to sea but so long as the ship is in port he's ashore dead drunk. I shall have to go and bail him out of clink the day we sail."

“I’ll bring three of my best seamen over this afternoon and we’ll get the cargo in the holds.”

“Let’s get this thing straight. What’s your idea, Moorhouse?”

“I’ll leave my three good seamen in your ship and get to sea with a scratch crew, and I’ll arrange for Paddy Doran to shanghai two more hands for you. You can then set off. Get a chart of the course and I’ll tell you my plan.”

Soon the two captains were poring over the chart, Pemberton’s story had continued. At last it was agreed that the two ships should rendezvous at the island of St Michael in the Azores.

‘And then what?’ asked Briggs.

‘When you reach the island give the crew a good advance and shore leave, especially Hullock the mate.’

‘What’s the idea?’

‘Once ashore with money they won’t be in a hurry to return to the ship. You will have my three good men on board. Make some excuse for getting to sea—say a gale is springing up. Once outside harbour make for this spot.’ Moorhouse marked with a red cross a position in the North Atlantic about four days’ sail. ‘I’ll be there and you’ll be flying a distress signal. I’ll assist you into port and then claim salvage, which we’ll split. How’s that for a scheme?’

‘What about your three men?’

‘Leave that to me, Briggs. I’ll have to square the customs this end to manage it.’

Moorhouse then went ashore to collect his three hands. Briggs sent for Pemberton.

‘Cooky, make my bunk up with clean sheets and blankets at once. Have we got any pillow slips?’

‘None in the ship, sir’, replied Pemberton.

‘Well, run ashore and get half a dozen. I am taking Mrs Briggs with me this trip.’

Pemberton could only gasp in surprise. Conditions in

the ship were in no way suitable for carrying ladies, even as passengers.

That afternoon Captain Briggs went to the calaboose and bailed the mate Hullock out. The man had spent four days in prison and was more or less sober. This was the usual routine when the ship was due to sail. Only the fact that he was a good seaman enabled Hullock to keep his job.

Once on board he took on his duties. He knew nothing of the plot and was only concerned with the time of sailing. Later that afternoon Paddy Doran arrived with a lorry carrying two men he had 'shanghaied' from his boarding house. Both were hopelessly drunk and were literally thrown into the ship. A tug had been ordered for early morning to tow the ship into the stream on the first tide. The drunks would lie comatose for the next two days.

As soon as Hullock had settled down Briggs sent for him.

'Hullock, I'm taking Mrs Briggs to Europe in the ship', he said.

'A woman in this ship? Why it's impossible, there's no accommodation for females.'

Briggs took no notice of this remark, simply telling Hullock she was arriving that evening with her piano which he was to see carried carefully on board and lashed in any place in the saloon she wanted.

'A piano?' said Hullock, 'Why we've no means of getting it on board.'

'It's only a small one, she calls it her baby', added Briggs, and turning on his heel left Hullock to grumble and swear by himself.

Late that evening a lorry drew up and a shrill voice called from the wharf, 'Is this ship the *Mary Sellars*?'

Hullock heard and went down to the wharf.

'That's the name of this ship, Missus. Do you want anyone?'

'Yes, my husband Captain Briggs.'

'He's ashore getting the ship's papers. We sail on the morning tide. But come along inboard and I'll get your gear in.'

Mrs Briggs paid off the driver of the lorry and repaired on board. Meanwhile the mate had called on two hands to carry her gear. But it took three of them to get the piano up the steep gangway and into the saloon. Mrs Briggs was waiting for it. When the instrument arrived she was standing by the bulkhead. 'Put it here, please', she ordered.

The men carried the piano to the place she indicated. But Hullock was not too pleased, for his bunk was only the other side of that bulkhead. He took his sleep in the afternoons and she might play on the thing and disturb him. He made an effort to get her to place it elsewhere but she insisted that the place she chose was the only one where the light suited, so there it had to go. Hullock lashed it to the bulkhead as best he could, with a very bad grace.

Next morning the tug arrived. She had to tow another ship so her master wanted to get away with the *Marie Celeste*. She picked up the sailing ship *Victoria* and towed the two ships into the stream.

The *Victoria* was never heard of again, and the *Marie Celeste* became probably the most talked of ship in the merchant service.

Bad weather set in as soon as the tug had slipped her tow-line. The two men carried on board took two days to recover, and when interviewed by Briggs proved to be farm labourers who had never seen the inside of a ship and knew nothing about the work. One was a great hulking fellow with a violent temper. He would fight anyone as soon as look at them. He so scared Pemberton that he used always to keep a pot of boiling water on his stove to throw over the bully should he attempt to come into the galley and steal food that was cooking there.

Mrs Briggs soon got her sea legs and then spent most of the afternoon playing on her 'baby' and singing hymn

tunes. The mate was prevented from getting his sleep, just as he had feared.

'Can't you stop that woman from squawking hymns all the afternoon?' he asked Briggs.

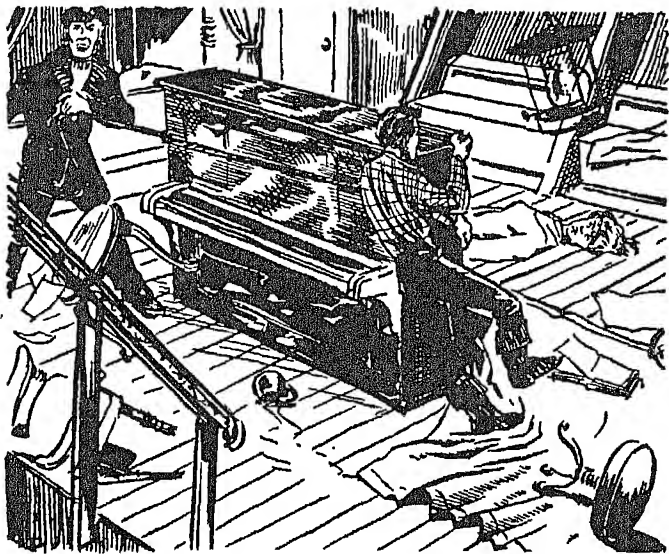
'You ought to be glad to hear those fine old hymn tunes', was all Briggs answered.

'They're all right in church but not in a ship', grumbled Hullock.

So bad feeling grew between the two men. Briggs began to regret bringing his wife, for she certainly caused unrest on board. The bad weather grew worse. Mrs Briggs seemed to think that the more hymns she sang the more likely it would be to abate.

The next day the ship ran into a hurricane. Briggs had everything battened down and this included the saloon in which Mrs Briggs was sitting playing her piano and singing. Her voice could be heard above the howling of the wind in the shrouds. The waves rose to almost mountainous size and the ship was making very bad weather of it. Suddenly an extra large wave struck the ship and she shuddered and reeled almost on to her beam ends. Then from the saloon came a thud, followed by shrieks. The captain dashed off the poop, grabbed the life lines, and reached the gratings over the saloon. He peered through but the saloon was in darkness and there was no sound of music or singing. What had happened? Then he heard a sound that caused his heart to miss a beat. It was the sound of something heavy being thrown across the deck and hitting the ship's side with a dull thud.

The dreadful truth burst on him. The piano had broken loose from the lashings and was being hurled hither and thither with the violent motions of the ship. Mrs Briggs was in that darkened saloon with this danger; she might be seriously injured. As he looked a ray of light penetrated the saloon and he saw a small hand protruding from under the piano. His wife was under it and being slowly crushed to death.



Then a struggle commenced between the two men
and the inanimate piano.

Yelling to a deck hand to bring a crowbar he managed to open the companion-way, and he and the deck hand rushed into the saloon. He narrowly escaped being hit by the instrument as it slithered across the floor impelled by the list of the ship. Then a struggle commenced between the two men and the inanimate piano. At any moment it might take charge and sweep them against the bulkhead, but with skill, courage, and judgment they managed at last to throw it on to its side and chock it there. The poor woman was lying on the deck, a mangled, bruised form. Briggs fell on his knees beside her and tenderly took her in his arms. She was past help and for hours he sat with the dead body in his arms kissing her and saying loving words. Then he saw the frayed rope that held the piano to

the bulkhead. He looked at it carefully. He knew that the mate hated her for robbing him of his afternoon sleep. Had he deliberately frayed the rope ends so that, with any strain, the piano would lurch forward and injure her? The more his demented mind dwelt on this possibility, the more convinced was Briggs that this was the cause of the accident and the death of his wife.

He collected the frayed ends, which he saw showed the marks of a knife edge. He would charge Hullock with the murder of his wife. There was no doubt that his mind was unhinged by the tragedy. At last he rose and called for Pemberton. He took him along to number two hatch. By now the wind had dropped and the storm was abating. Together the men managed to haul out a barrel of alcohol and trundle it along to his cabin. It was his intention to carry the body to Europe as evidence against Hullock. He carefully laid the frayed ends in his drawer then he tried to put the frail body of his wife in the barrel of alcohol to preserve it. He remembered that in this way the body of Lord Nelson was brought home after Trafalgar.

Pemberton told some of the crew what was happening and they reported it to the mate. At once Hullock went along to Briggs's cabin and a fearful row ensued, which ended in a fight. Briggs was knocked unconscious by the stronger man.

Hullock then decided to have the funeral at once. He called the boatswain and told him to sew up the body and when all was ready he held the service. Pemberton said the mate knew nothing about religion and simply crossed himself and said 'Tip her up', which was the last of poor Mrs Briggs.

Hullock intended to go along and see how the captain was, but he had no need for suddenly he heard a dreadful yelling and Briggs appeared. He was clearly mad and on top of this he had been drinking crude alcohol freely. He ran aft and saw the grating with the torn flag and guessed at once what had happened. He sprang on to the bulwark

and with a scream hurled himself into the raging sea. It was useless to get the boat away for it was dark and great seas were running after the storm. The remarkable fact, according to Pemberton, was that as soon as the body was over the side the wind dropped, the clouds dispersed, and the seas fell.

From then on the voyage became an orgy of drinking. Hullock took the captain's store of liquor and the crew helped themselves to the barrel of crude alcohol lying outside the captain's cabin. One morning, to the surprise of Hullock, land was sighted. Certainly it was the Azores but what island they were approaching nobody knew. It was not St Michael, where the rendezvous was. Hullock had learned this from Briggs. No sooner was the anchor down than the crew clamoured for shore leave. A sudden idea struck Hullock. In his befuddled state he decided to abandon the ship.

* * *

Pemberton's story was told in serial form and Pyke had to wait for some days for the next instalment. Then one evening he went on with it.

Hullock called the crew on deck, gave them a drink all round, and then told his plan.

'Look here, men, this has been a terrible trip. Three lives have been lost [the big bully had disappeared one night]. What do you say if I pay you all off here, then burn this old hooker? I'll give you all a clean discharge. We can go ashore and say we had to leave the ship as she was on fire. There will be another put in soon. Now what do you all say?'

There were murmurs of assent from most of the crew, but the three men from the *Dei Gratia* spoke up. Moffat the leader said:

'We're not on the Articles of this ship.'

'You'll never see the *Dei Gratia* again. We're over one

hundred miles from our rendezvous.' He passed the bottle round and the men took a swig at it.

Then Pemberton said he protested, but Hullock told him to shut up. As was the custom in those days the captain carried a lot of money with him. Hullock found this and paid all the men right up to date. Then he called some shore boats which were lying off the ship waiting for jobs and the crew who had been paid off got into them, leaving the three men from the *Dei Gratia* and Pemberton the British cook on board. As Hullock left he said, 'I'll be back soon to settle you fellows.'

Moffat was sure Hullock would not come back for a few days so he suggested they make themselves comfortable. However, as soon as the sun set, a strong wind began to blow from the sea. The ship was dragging her anchor and drifting close to the rocks. Moffat took charge.

'Hi! fellers, we'd better get some sail up and heave up the anchor, or we shall be aground.'

It was a strenuous task, but the four of them managed to hoist a jib and one of the square sails. Then they manned the capstan and got the anchor catted. Moffat took the wheel and soon they were safe outside the harbour. That night the wind blew up to gale strength and when dawn came there was no land to be seen. Now Moffat was a good seaman but no navigator. He had some idea of compass sailing, but where to set a course? That was the question. The gale still persisted and it was evident they would never make the island, so Moffat decided to steer by the sun and keep due east. He argued rightly that Europe was somewhere in that direction and they were bound to sight land one day. When the storm dropped he and the others managed to hoist more sail. Four days passed and the weather brightened considerably. The mate had taken the instruments with him and burned all the ship's papers and the Log Book, but there was plenty of food on board and the men felt fairly happy.

Pemberton said he had to take his turn at the wheel

and rather liked it. The next morning Moffat was at the wheel and Pemberton on the look-out when he saw a ship. 'Ship on the port beam', he yelled.

In a trice the two men came up from below and peered seaward. Moffat lashed the wheel and joined them. She had evidently sighted them, for she was closing. As the two ships neared each other a cry of astonishment went up from them all. 'It's our old hooker the *Dei Gratia*', they shouted.

The 'million to one' chance had come off. Two ships had left New York forty-seven days ago, had never sighted each other, one had missed the rendezvous, and now they met in Mid-Atlantic. It was too fantastic to be true.

* * *

That was the tale the cook of the *Marie Celeste* told Pyke. By this time the mystery had died down but had he been apprehended he would have made a valuable witness. Again if the Admiralty official knew anything about the papers of a merchant ship he could have picked up something. These papers are called the Ship's Articles and contain a full list of all hands from the captain to the cabin boy.

Why didn't Moffat and his two pals speak up? The answer no doubt is that Moorhouse was aware of the danger of these men talking too much. He told them that they would be implicated in the three deaths that had happened in the *Marie Celeste* and they were frightened. Seamen in those days were mostly uneducated. Many of them could not read or write. Telling the men that they had better remain on board during the ship's stay in Gibraltar, he bribed them with a sum of money.

Moorhouse had intended to defraud the shippers by a bogus claim, which might or might not have succeeded, but the fact that he found the ship practically adrift in

Mid-Atlantic and assisted her into port did actually entitle him to some compensation.

The courts awarded him the sum of seventeen hundred pounds 'for rendering assistance to a distressed vessel'. This is a very different matter from 'finding a derelict and bringing her into port', which would have meant an award of at least twenty thousand pounds.

What happened to the crew of the *Marie Celeste*? Apparently they disappeared somehow. Several explanations were offered by the English papers but facts are stubborn things and the finding of the court after careful investigation seemed to give the lie to the many fanciful legends surrounding this mystery.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GREAT HURRICANE

UNLESS you happen to have been in one, it is almost impossible to realize the terrible force of wind and water in a hurricane at sea. I've seen the sea break over the fo'c'sle of a large ship and hit the iron winch, and after that sea had passed into the well-deck the winch looked like a smashed sardine tin. Iron bars as thick as a man's wrist were twisted to look like the spiral springs of a huge clock that had been broken.

No doubt when Balboa climbed the peak of Darien and saw that vast expanse of water glistening in the sun it looked as if it deserved the name it was later given—Pacific, or 'peaceful', Ocean. He could not have guessed that it can be the scene of terrible storms, which blow up with amazing suddenness. The sky may all be clear and only the falling glass indicate the storm's approach. It was one of these storms which was responsible for the ordeal of the crew of H.M.S. *Calliope*.

On the afternoon of 15 March 1889 there were twenty-nine ships in the harbour of Apia, on the island of Upolo, one of the Samoan group in the South Pacific. Seven of them were men-of-war, three German, three United States, and one British. The fighting ships were there on account of the political unrest existing between Germany and the Samoan people. The other vessels were merchant ships of varying sizes. Thus the scene was laid for one of the greatest disasters of that century.

Captain Kane looked carefully at the barometer. It registered the strikingly low figure of 27.8 degrees. He had never seen so low a glass in all his years of seafaring. He looked at the weather. The sky was deep blue and

strangely clear. His mind was made up. Turning to his messenger he said,

‘Ask the Staff Engineer to come to my cabin.’

The Staff Engineer of H.M.S. *Calliope* had seen the engines installed at the yard of Messrs Fairfield, of Glasgow, and knew every nut and bolt in them. He stepped into the cabin.

‘Oh, Bourke’, said the captain, ‘have you noticed the glass?’

‘Yes sir, I’ve never seen it fall so low.’

‘That’s why I sent for you. Keep a good head of steam ready for an emergency. We may have to cut and run if the weather gets bad.’

‘I’ve given orders for the watches in my department to be double-banked, sir.’

‘Splendid’, said the captain.

The harbour at Apia was not an enclosed piece of water, it was actually part of the Pacific Ocean locked in by coral reefs. There was an opening in the reefs of some three hundred yards, through which ships passed to the anchorage inside. The bottom was mainly of coral, which gave very poor holding for ships’ anchors. The whole place was rather like a large bowl of coral. Every captain in that harbour was aware of the danger and when, on the next afternoon, the wind began to blow and rain started, they all knew that if the storm increased they were in grave peril and would be much safer riding it out on the ocean outside.

The reason why they did not all leave harbour was that not one of them wished to be the first to show the ‘white feather’. Had one of them hoisted the signal ‘Am preparing to put to sea’ all would have followed suit, and many lives would have been saved. Admiral Kennedy was the senior naval officer there and his ship, the U.S.S. *Trenton*, lay close to the opening. Many anxious eyes were turned to the American ship, but no such signal was given.

By the evening the wind had increased to gale force.

All that night the tempest grew fiercer and by daybreak the next morning the situation became alarming. Several vessels were flying the signal 'out of control', and the risk of colliding with these was imminent. The German ship *Eber* was drifting about, perilously close to other vessels. Suddenly, as all were watching her antics, she forged ahead as if making a bid to get out but was caught by the wind and swung out of her course. She crashed into the U.S.S. *Nipsic*; the next great wave took her off but she then fell foul of the German ship *Olga*. The crew of the *Olga* managed to fend her off, but the next minute she was picked up by a huge roller and hurled on to the top of the reef. She lay there for a few minutes, her hull plainly visible, then gave a lurch and disappeared into the sea outside the reef. Some of her crew managed to reach the reef and in this very precarious position to hang on till rescued.

The force of the wind had caused the sea to run in tremendous waves. Eye witnesses say that some of them were seventy feet high. The hurricane blew almost directly into the small anchorage, and huge waves struck the reef at the sides and were sent sprawling back among others in the confined space. The whole harbour was a seething mass of waves, tearing hither and thither in no settled order. Ships dragged their anchors and became out of control. No engine or rudder could function in that frenzy of wind and water.

Then the rain fell with tropical intensity. As the waves broke into creaming foam the hurricane whipped off the spume and flung it high in the air, so that visibility was practically nil. It was worse than thick fog, for this flying spume seemed to assume the shape of a ship, which added to the uncertainty.

So bad were conditions that it was almost a case of every man for himself. All that could be done was to arm the crews with heavy fenders and so endeavour to lessen the impact from other ships fouling them. It was as if a wall

of wind and water repeatedly crashed on the ships. One after another was wrecked on the reef or ran on the sandy beach. It was like a procession of ships going to their doom. The U.S.S. *Nipsic* ran into the German ship *Olga* before she disappeared, then she collided with the schooner *Lily*. Fended off, she was driven on to the shore and landed on a sandy patch in front of the American consulate. She tried to lower her boats but as soon as they reached the water they capsized.

The small merchant ships were driven higgledy-piggledy about the harbour and often were holed and sank before the eyes of the onlookers in other ships. Yet they could not go to the assistance of the drowning men, for it was impossible to get boats away in the terrific turmoil in that small space.

The Samoans behaved splendidly. They were at war with the Germans but regardless of this they worked like demons to rescue them. All the long day and night they carried on with the arduous work. They leapt into the surf to drag half drowned men to shore. Some of them crawled along the reef and dropped into the sea, hoping to be carried by the waves close enough to a ship to help the crews and also to salvage provisions and stores from the wrecks to enable survivors to subsist till the arrival of rescue ships.

The hurricane was now at its worst. The *Calliope* had had several narrow escapes. She fouled the *Vandalia* and lost her bowsprit. Captain Kane sent for Bourke.

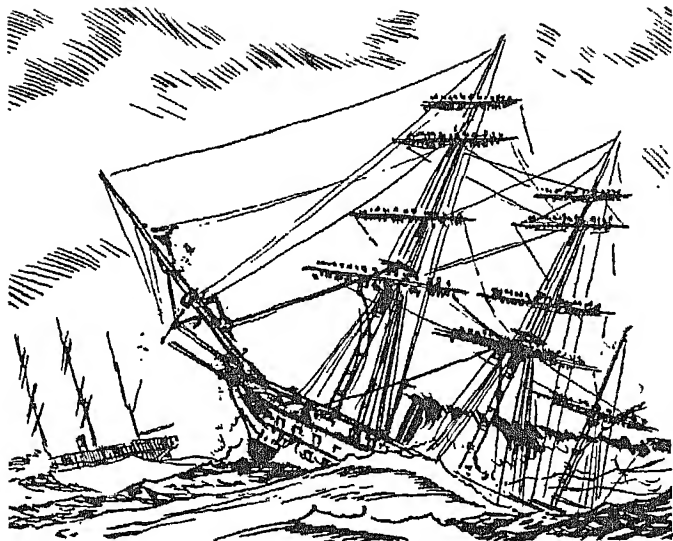
'I'm slipping cables and getting out of this', he said.

'We're all ready in the engine room, sir', said Bourke.

'We shall have to rely entirely on your men and your engines.'

'We'll do our best.'

It was a momentous decision to make. Bourke returned to the engine-room. 'Stand by', he ordered. Almost at once the engine room telegraph tinkled. It read: 'Full steam ahead'.



The men acted as sails in the rigging and saved the ship from destruction.

The fight was on. Every available hand was working. Inch by inch the ship fought her way out of that cauldron of terror, making for the open sea. It was an hour before the ship showed any sign of being under control or reacting to her engines. The bearings were running red-hot and hose pipes were requisitioned to play cold water on them to enable them to do their job. At last she began to move ahead. Slowly she made for the narrow opening. The strain on her rudder was enormous and it suddenly gave way. It was madness to order men over the side to repair it but unless this was done the ship was doomed. Captain Kane called for volunteers and soon three men were lowered over the side. In the teeth of the hurricane these men managed to do the job.

The U.S.S. *Trenton* had drifted perilously close to the reef. As she turned broadside on to the hurricane, thrown that way by the turbulent seas, the wind caught her again and swept her back. Then a strange sight was seen. Admiral Kennedy ordered the crew into the weather rigging, telling them to lie as close together as possible and link arms. This compact mass of men acted as a sail in the rigging and saved the ship from destruction. The wind struck the men with such violence they had their work cut out to hang on but she was forced away from the reef and into the deep water.

In her passage through the entrance the *Calliope* passed quite close to the *Trenton*. Seeing her brave effort Admiral Kennedy called to his crew,

‘Give the darned Britishers a cheer, boys.’

Although these American sailors were facing almost certain death they gave a rousing cheer as the *Calliope* slowly passed them. It was heartily returned.

Yes, the *Calliope* was going to make the opening. In a few more minutes she was clear of the reef and in the open sea. The hurricane still blew but she was able to ride it out with no drifting ships to contend with.

The harbour was a picture of storm havoc, but the people ashore had not escaped. Houses were flattened, and huts swept away. Many buildings had their roofs blown off and severe damage was done to local crops. Both the American and British residents assisted at rescue work. The U.S.S. *Vandalia* was swept along the whole distance of the reef and finally her bows stuck in the sand. This was about a hundred yards from shore and in less than an hour she was completely submerged. Her crew tried to reach the sandy beach, and the natives made a human chain extending well into the surf and seized the drowning men as they were swept shorewards. It is known that during these operations several Samoans lost their lives, but the exact number has never been arrived at. As they worked they sang and this was heard above the din and uproar of the

tempest. They seemed to delight in their self-appointed task.

By dawn on Sunday 17 March the wind and sea had moderated. Along the shores of Apia and along the reefs wreckage could be seen near and far. Throughout all Sunday the Samoans worked under the leadership of their chiefs in efforts to salvage the wrecks. They assisted in re-floating the *Nipsic* and *Olga*, and both ships were towed to Sydney, Australia, and repaired.

H.M.S. *Calliope* made for Sydney. She carried with her a German officer who was visiting the ship when the hurricane broke. It was impossible for him to rejoin his ship so he was kept aboard. On arriving at Sydney he was so impressed with the fine seamanship of the officers and men that he went ashore and bought a silver claret jug, which was inscribed as follows:

*'Der Offizier Mess I.S.M. Calliope H. Emsmann
Leutenant zur See 4/4/89'*

When the ship paid off at Portsmouth the question arose of to whom the jug belonged. Captain Kane suggested that lots should be drawn for it. This was done and Fleet Engineer Bourke was the lucky one.*

The whole world rang with praises for the bravery of the crew of H.M.S. *Calliope* and the natives ashore. The *Calliope* was fêted everywhere she went. In New Zealand she came in for special acclamations because the fact had been published that the coal she was using came from there. The United States Navy Department made the natives a present of a large, double-banked whale boat to replace one they had lost in their rescue work. The Germans lacked imagination, but felt that something was due to the Samoans for saving the lives of many of their people, so they paid three dollars for each German rescued.

In two days the hurricane had petered out and all was

* He happened to be my father-in-law and after his death the jug passed to me.

calm in the harbour. But during the storm one hundred and forty-six men had been killed, six warships had been lost, and of all the merchant ships there only one small schooner managed to escape the fury of the elements.

The scene in the harbour was tragic in the extreme. All round the reef were the wrecks of fine ships and small craft. The beach was strewn with wreckage. It was impossible to attempt any salvage and for many years these skeletons lay telling the story of the terrible ravages nature can inflict when bent on destruction. Robert Louis Stevenson was living on the island at the time—and he wrote about the storm. He finished by saying that ‘these ships lie today on the reef a playground for seals and sea-lions and a roosting place for seabirds’.

A French nobleman was so moved by the story that he had medals struck in commemoration of the event. I have one in my hand as I write, and this is the inscription. ‘*British seamanship and Captain Kane of H.M.S. Calliope from an admirer, The Marquis de Leuville.*’

CHAPTER FIVE

AN AMERICAN STORY OF SHIPWRECK

THE brig *Tyrrel*, from the shipyards of Boston, was stoutly built to withstand the storms that sometimes rage in the Bay of Fundy. Her captain was proud of her. She was his first command after he had served for many years in the East Coast trade. Captain Coghlan was a Bluenose—the name given to Nova Scotians. He was a young man and a keen sailor. The *Tyrrel* was bound for Antigua, one of the West Indian islands, in ballast. There she was to pick up a cargo of sugar and return to New York.

On 28 June 1759 she set sail. The mate Purnell reported to the captain that all below was 'safe and snug' and soon she had cleared the harbour and was making for the open sea. Once outside she met the full force of a north-easterly gale. Captain Coghlan was pacing the poop, keeping a sharp eye on the weather, and, seeing that the glass was falling, he told the mate to reef topsails. He was a trifle disturbed by the way in which the ship rolled. The mate sent the watch aloft to shorten sail.

'Mister, did you see to the ballasting of the ship?' asked the captain.

'No, cap'en', replied Purnell, 'I only joined her the day before you came. I think it was the dock master that saw to it.'

'She seems a bit too stiff for my liking', commented the captain.

'I was thinking much the same, cap'en.'

The two men continued to feel uneasy. The gale lasted two days and then petered out. But the captain still watched the ship anxiously. She was riding light and occasionally she would take a list and remain there for an appreciable time. Next day she ran into another gale, and neither the captain nor the mate liked her antics. She would roll violently, then tremble and shudder as if not quite decided to roll back on an even keel or plunge clean over on her beam ends.

'I don't like the way she behaves, Mister', said the captain to Purnell.

'I'm with you there, cap'en.'

'Send the carpenter round with his sounding line and tell him to report to me.'

After a while the carpenter returned. He looked worried.

'Well, Chippy, what's the result?'

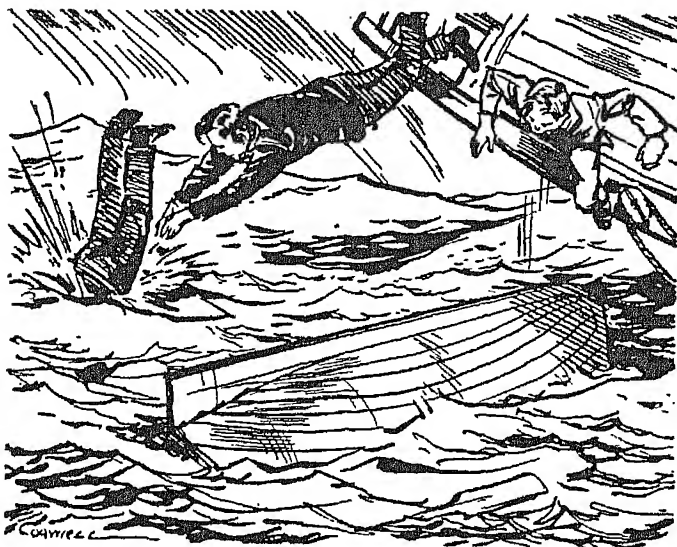
'She's making a little water, cap'en, in the bilges but not more than could be pumped out by each watch.'

This ship, as has been explained, was Captain Coghlan's first command. He hated to find fault with her, but a 'still small voice' urged him to take action. Should he return to New York and show the 'white feather' to his brother captains? While he was ruminating as to what would be the best course to take the ship gave a tremendous lurch and threw the captain clean off his feet. That decided him. Something was seriously wrong with her stability. But instead of returning to New York he would make for the Bacon Island Roads in North Carolina and have a thorough examination made of the ballast stowage.

His mind made up he sent for Purnell and told him his intention. The look of relief on the mate's face assured him that he was doing the right thing.

'She's crank all right', was all that the mate said, but it conveyed much.

'Call out the watch and "wear" her at once', ordered



Purnell, with the two hands, jumped into the sea.

the captain. 'And unlash the boat in case anyone goes overboard', he added as an afterthought.

The carpenter was lying in his bunk when he heard the order given 'Wear ship'. Hardly had the vessel swung off the wind than a sudden squall struck her. She heeled over, shook herself, then swiftly rolled on to her beam ends—she was completely overset. Everything movable was thrown into the sea, including the boat, which struck the water and turned bottom upwards. Purnell saw this accident and, realizing that the loss of the boat would be disastrous, called on two hands and with them jumped into the sea. He managed to grasp the painter and tow the boat alongside and he and the two men, by almost superhuman efforts, righted her. But she was full to the gunwale. He called on two cabin boys to jump in her and,

with buckets, bale her out. He then saw that all the contents had been unshipped, she had no rudder, no tiller, no oars. He called to the carpenter to bring spares, which 'Chippy' did.

Purnell and the two seamen then scrambled into her and set about picking up some of the crew who were in the water. The ship was slowly sinking: nothing could save her from a watery grave. Captain Coghlan was hanging precariously on to one of the yards. Every now and then great blisters burst on the surface—bubbles caused by the air escaping from the holds and confined spaces.

The accident had been so sudden that no-one had time to collect any gear. The captain had stayed with the ship as long as possible, and in reaching the yard had severely injured himself. When Purnell managed to hoist him into the boat he lapsed into unconsciousness. There was no first-aid outfit in the boat's locker and when Purnell came to look, he found that the water casks were empty and there was no food. They all watched eagerly for some provisions to float to the surface. A small keg of ship's biscuits was found but the contents were hopelessly damaged by sea water.

Purnell had decided to get clear of the stricken ship in case, in her dying struggles, the boat might get entangled with the rigging and be drawn beneath the surface. He had cleared a space in the stern for the sick captain, and he sat by him waiting for him to recover consciousness. When he did he tried to speak. The mate stooped and heard:

'You'd better take charge, Mister, I'm about all in', and with the effort spurts of blood flowed through his lips.

'Sorry you're bad, cap'en', said Purnell, 'leave it to me.' The captain sank into a troubled sleep.

When searching the locker the mate had taken out the compass. In the turmoil of getting away someone had stepped on it and smashed it, so it was quite useless. He

had only the sun and stars to steer by. Further he was uncertain as to the exact position of the ship when she sank. He wondered what direction to take for the Bacon Roads and decided to ask the captain what course to set, but the captain was evidently dying. His breath became fainter and fainter. Purnell tried to feel his pulse but the movement of the boat made this impossible. Just before sunset the captain breathed his last. For some time all in the boat sat stunned. Seventeen men in a small boat sixteen feet long with no food or water and now no captain. Their condition was certainly a parlous one.

They had been four days afloat without food or water and some of them were so weak that the long oars almost fell out of their hands. Purnell decided to make a sail, for the one in the boat had been swept away when the boat slid overboard. He called on each man to take off the garment he could best spare, and as they shed them Purnell pieced them together to make as large a sail as possible. Unfortunately they could find no needles or thread in the locker, so thin fishing lines were used. Holes were cut with a penknife and the lines threaded through. Using one of the oars as a mast and splitting one of the thwarts, they hoisted the sail. It must have looked remarkable but it served its purpose.

During the day one of the crew drank a lot of salt water. As a result he was violently sick. When he recovered he tried to throw himself overboard. It was plain that he was demented, so Purnell ordered two men to seize him and lash him under one of the thwarts and sit on the thwart to restrain him. Their vigil did not last long for the man suddenly gave a great cry and passed away.

A fresh breeze sprang up in the night and the cool air seemed to carry moisture, for it revived the weakened men. But all were in a desperate condition and at sunset that night another seaman died. Purnell was not a religious man but he tried to remember some part of the Lord's Prayer as the bodies were thrown over the side.

With death as a companion, all thought their own time had come, and muttered what prayers they could recollect. Fortunately the sun was bright and not too hot next day so Purnell set them on the task of cleaning up the boat. 'I added another coat to the lugsail', he said when relating his experiences.

Next morning the look-out shouted 'A sail, a sail'. Purnell fixed his red waistcoat at the masthead as a distress signal and made for the vessel. The small oars were shipped and the men made frantic efforts to get close to her. Night came on and still they laboured but with the dawn came the sickening news that she was no longer to be seen. Evidently she had not sighted the small boat.

This bitter disappointment told heavily on them. They became fractious like sick children. Each man quarrelled with his neighbour. One sitting on the thwart would suddenly conceive the notion that his mate was occupying more than his share. The fracas would start by one man shoving the next along. This would lead to arguments and sometimes to fisticuffs. Purnell told them that by this action they were using up valuable energy, but the trouble grew worse as the men weakened. During the day some of them spotted green leaves in the water. Land could not be far off, they said, and took heart again.

'You may be right, lads', said Purnell 'the water is colouring, which means shoaling.' He knew well that his words meant nothing. His only hope was to keep them from musing on their own sufferings.

It was now eleven days since food or drink had passed their lips. All were light-headed, some insane. One seaman knelt repeatedly in prayer and his only request was that God would give him one drop of water to ease his parched throat. When seamen find themselves in open small boats they are invariably seasick, and the crew suffered terribly from this malady. The dreary monotony of sea and sky day after day nearly drove them frantic.

The fact that the sea was dead calm infuriated them. They longed—no, prayed—for a strong gale. For one thing it might bring rain, and so assuage their dreadful thirst.

One of the cabin boys could not get used to the horrid motion of the small boat. So bad did he get that Purnell ordered him to be placed under the dodger (the canvas covering at the fore-end of the boat) and some of the men took off their singlets and threw them over the lad, for he was shivering with ague. He was the youngest among them and all took a fatherly interest in him. When he fell into a troubled sleep all took care to moderate their voices and keep as quiet as possible in moving about.

By this time the men were almost at their last gasp. Each day one of them died, and those remaining were too weak to lift the body reverently, and had to prise it up with a wooden sleeper and tumble it into the sea. No one tried to repeat any prayer. After a week on one course Purnell began to fear that he was not sailing in the right direction. He had enough commonsense to realize that his memory might be affected by hunger and thirst. He looked round the boat. Just three of the seventeen were alive, himself, the carpenter, and the lad who was so seasick.

A corpse was lying in the bottom of the boat. Purnell looked at it, then he saw the carpenter watching him. With feverish haste the two exerted all their strength and the dead man fell into the sea. Both men looked at each other and each read the other's thoughts. That night the lad breathed his last. The two men left were starving and parched with thirst. Purnell reached out and touched the dead body—it was stone cold. He turned to his companion and though no word was spoken the mind of each was laid bare. Purnell cut a slice of flesh from the inside of the lad's thigh. Part he handed to the carpenter. The two men turned away from each other, ashamed of what they were about to do. But the attempt to swallow human flesh failed, their stomachs refused to retain it and both became terribly ill.

In their agony of mind both fell into a stupor, and when Purnell woke he found he was alone in the boat—the carpenter had disappeared. He looked with horror at the mutilated body of the cabin boy and tried to mutter a prayer, but no words came.

Twenty-two days after the wreck he found some barnacles on the boat's rudder. He managed to unship it and scraped them off with his knife. He ate them and felt strengthened, but still he was so weak it took him all the rest of the day to ship the rudder. When morning broke he felt even joyful. He couldn't understand the queer change that came over him. He felt certain land was near and he rose in the middle of the day and, leaning against the mast, took great draughts of the bright morning air.

As he stood in the bright sunshine he imagined he saw a sail. What a fool he was to think that this was anything but a dream. He took his eyes away and searched the horizon for signs of birds and saw none. Then to see if his imagination was still playing him tricks he looked again in the direction he had first seen the sail. He now saw a two-masted ship. She was fast approaching him. He still didn't believe his eyes and lay down in the boat. In a semi-drowsy state he laughed at himself for being so silly as to think a ship was close to him. Then he heard a hail. 'Ahoy, Ahoy' come loudly across the water.

He managed to hoist himself and, hanging on to the mast with one hand, waved his arm to see if this thing of his imagination would answer his salute. What a joke it was.

But the ship was alongside now and a rope was thrown to him. This was no imaginary vessel, the men leaning over the bulwarks were not ghosts. He managed to catch the rope but then the men on deck seemed to shrink from contact with him. They were looking at two corpses which Purnell had not strength to throw overboard. Was the ship's boat carrying a contagious disease such as plague? After some suspense they called 'Come aboard', and

flung a Jacob's Ladder over the ship's side for him to grasp.

Purnell could not shout loudly enough for them to hear that he was quite incapable of climbing the ladder. He showed them his condition by falling in a stupor in the bottom of his boat.

'Two of you go down and lash that poor fellow up, we must hoist him aboard', ordered the captain, seeing the dreadful condition the man was in.

Soon Purnell was lying on the deck of the rescue ship. He was given a drink of water—the first he had tasted for twenty-eight days. He was carried to a cabin and treated with the greatest kindness. For three more days he could eat nothing but soup. His body was a mass of suppurating ulcers. So helpless was he that day and night a seaman sat at his bedside watching him. At last the ship reached port and Purnell was taken ashore. It needed two men to help him to walk, and in hospital it was three weeks before he could walk alone. Only after three months of careful nursing was he allowed out as cured.

CHAPTER SIX

TERROR BY SEA AND LAND

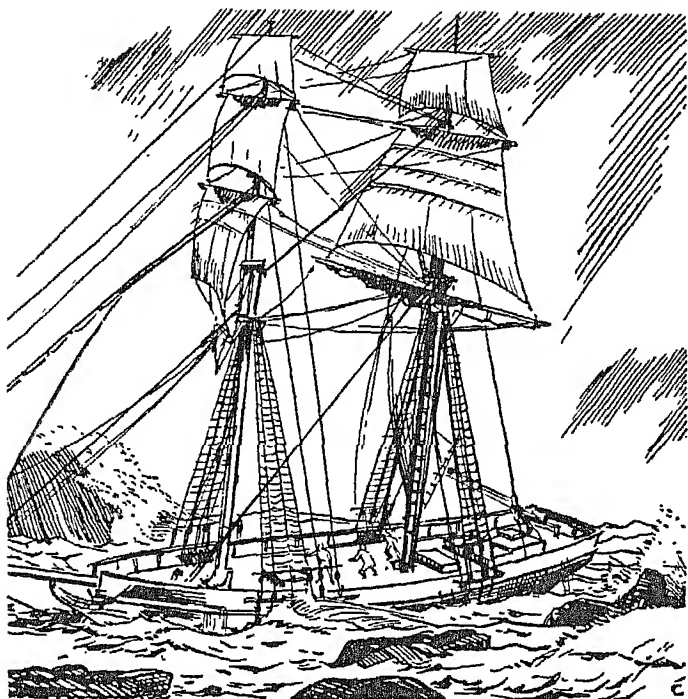
WHEN man first began to conquer the sea he had not only to contend with the perils of that element but also the risk of being wrecked on a savage shore and attacked by hostile natives. Here is a remarkable story of an American master mariner who faced these two perils and won through.

James Riley was the captain of the Brig *Commerce*. She was a new ship from the shipyard of East Boston, of about 220 tons burden and well found. Her crew consisted of two mates, seven seamen, a cabin boy, and black cook. She was travelling 'light' as far as Europe, where she was to pick up a cargo for Sierra Leone. She sailed from New Orleans on 24 June 1815.

Arriving at Gibraltar, she took in a cargo of wines, spirits, flour, and tobacco. She also shipped an extra hand. A course was set for the Cape Verde Islands. She had not been at sea long before she ran into dense fog, which increased daily. This made it difficult to take observations, and Captain Riley discovered, when the fog cleared, that he had passed these islands without seeing them. Two days later the fog fell again and that same night the lookout suddenly shouted:

'Breakers ahead, breakers ahead.'

Captain Riley was asleep in his cabin but the call soon brought him on deck, to find his ship was in the midst of the breakers. He at once ordered the helm to be put hard over and sails taken in, but it was too late. Almost immediately the ship struck the rocks with such violence that all the crew were thrown on to their faces. At once the *Commerce* began to take in water, and it was obvious that



The *Commerce* was in the midst of the breakers.

she was badly holed. The carpenter crawled round with his depth gauge and reported that she was already half filled and the sea was rising rapidly in the holds. There was only one thing to do, make every effort to get provisions and water into the boats before she sank. The boats were filled and the captain decided to stand by the ship till daybreak in the hope of saving her.

In the morning they could see land not far off and Captain Riley decided to try to make contact with the shore. He knew the risk, and since he would not ask one

of his crew to take on a job he wouldn't do himself he seized a line and jumped into the water. He found that as the surf receded from the shore it made a strong undertow, which almost sucked him to the bottom. He struggled on and eventually felt solid ground beneath his feet—he was safely ashore with the line. For some time he lay exhausted on the sand but, realizing that time was precious, he forced himself to haul on the line and soon a large hawser was in his hands. He made this fast to an overhanging rock and some of the crew slid ashore on it.

Several barrels of water, wine, and casks of bread and salt meat were landed, and as the ship was slowly breaking up the captain ordered the remainder of the crew to come ashore. He set them to work constructing a tent—with the oars from the boat and two sails. Captain Riley then examined the boat and found that it had been so badly damaged that it would scarcely float. The carpenter patched up the hole as well as he could, and then the captain gave orders to abandon work and take a well-earned rest while the cook prepared a meal.

While they were enjoying the meal a man was seen approaching. A scanty woollen cloth was his only garment, his skin was brighter than a Negro's; his eyes were red and fiery and he had a very large mouth; sharp teeth and a long black beard completed what Captain Riley thought the most terrific figure he had ever seen. He was soon joined by two women and several children, all armed with long knives. They fell upon the crates and boxes lying on the beach, tore them open, and seized whatever took their fancy.

Captain Riley tried to prevent them but they waved their knives in his face and evidently would have used them to effect if he had persisted in obstructing them. Having taken all they could carry the natives made signs that they would come back in the morning. Captain Riley made every effort to talk to them but either they could not or would not understand him.

The Captain and his men had little sleep that night, and early next morning the Arab reappeared with two young men and, apparently, his wives. From the attitude of the natives it was clear that they wanted to take away the tent. When the Americans opposed them the leader flew into a great rage and threatened them with his spear. Captain Riley had just decided to order a concerted attack on the Arab when he saw a drove of camels approaching. The Arab then pointed to the long boat and the wreck, and it was evident that he expected the ship-wrecked men to put off to the sunken ship. There was still a considerable part of the hull visible above water.

But before they had time to take to the boat the camels arrived with their drovers and immediately commenced stripping the tent. The Arab then drove the crew into their boat at the point of his spear. The drovers loaded their camels with the tent and as much of the provisions as they could pack on their beasts. Then the old Arab stove in the heads of their water casks and emptied their contents on the beach. Finally he took a look round and collected all the things they were unable to pack, made them into a heap, and set fire to them. Helplessly the men in the boat watched their only means of subsistence being destroyed or stolen.

Captain Riley ordered the crew to row to the wreck and see if there was any hope of getting any more stores out of her. But as the boat turned seawards she was struck by a big wave and nearly sank. The Arab was watching them, and he now made peaceful signs inviting them to come ashore again. In proof of his good faith the man held up a skinful of water as an offering. On the principle of choosing the lesser of two evils Riley decided to go back. The boat was rowed shorewards and Riley told the crew to stand off while he parleyed with the Arab. He sprang off the gunwale on to the sand and walked up to the natives, but as soon as he reached them two of the younger

men pinioned his arms to his sides, and the women flourished their long knives in his face.

'Baksheesh, baksheesh', they shouted.

Captain Riley had taken all the cash from the wreck and it was packed in the locker of the longboat. He called to the crew to get the cash and bring it ashore. One of the crew stepped ashore with it and the Arab at once started to count the dollars. It was clear that he was disappointed at the sum and he made threatening gestures, evidently expecting the Captain to disgorge more. At this instant Riley saw that the natives were off their guard and, calling to his shipmates to follow him, sprang from his keepers and made for the boat. Unfortunately Bates the seaman did not act quickly enough, and the natives caught him before he reached the water and killed him in a most brutal manner.

The wreck was now nearly submerged, and Riley decided to make a last effort to get some stores out of her. In this he was only partially successful, but with these few provisions he made for the open sea. The boat was indeed in a sorry state and needed constant baling. This irksome toil soon exhausted the half-starved men and Riley saw that he must make for the land again, hoping that the natives would not molest them. They had been six days in the boat and although every effort had been made to repair the damage she was now almost useless. So as soon as they could find a suitable landing place they went ashore, left the longboat on the beach, and set off inland. Captain Riley saw that the men were worn out and ordered them to lie down when they reached a sheltered spot. They all spent a good night undisturbed either by natives or wild beasts.

Next day they set out walking again but they were in a miserable condition. Without provisions, with wasted bodies, their tongues cleaving to the roofs of their mouths, their feet lacerated and bleeding, they could get no further that day than four miles. Next day they reached

the summit of rising ground. Riley had hoped that from the top they might see some greenery to allay their thirst but one uniform expanse of barrenness lay before them.

It was with the greatest difficulty that Captain Riley prevailed on his men to keep going. As evening approached without any prospect of relief, they were almost sinking in despair, when one of them called out,

‘A light, the light of a fire!’

Riley would not risk the party approaching the place till morning, but giving the crew instructions to await his return, crawled towards the light. When he returned he told the men that it was the resting place of a party of Arabs watering their camels. ‘There’s only one thing to do. We must ask them for food and water. It’s risking death, but if we don’t we shall die anyway.’ The crew agreed.

At day-break they made for the Arab camp. No sooner were they in sight than the Arabs ran towards them and surrounded them. They proceeded to strip the men, who were far too weak to offer any resistance. They then divided their forces into two parties, one of which moved off into the desert taking six of the crew with them, the other remaining with Captain Riley, the other three crew, and the black cook.

The party remaining filled their water bottles from the well. Five camels were selected for the sailors, which they were ordered to mount. The Arabs had saddles, but the sailors found themselves sitting on the camels’ backbones which were barely covered with skin and sharp as an oar blade, while their legs were stretched at full length as if they were sitting astride the roof of a shed. When the party set off at a smart trot the sufferings of the men became dreadful. The gait of a pack camel is different from that of a riding camel. The Arabs were all mounted on riding beasts but the sailors were on pack animals and the motion was extremely clumsy and made it hard to retain a seat. Their riders hung on to the long hair of the beasts, but soon they were bleeding and they piteously asked



The sailors found themselves sitting on the camels' backbones, which were as sharp as an oar blade.

their captors to let them follow on foot. The Arabs merely laughed at their distress.

At midnight the party halted and camel's milk was given to each of the captives. The pain in their limbs made sleep impossible. Next morning they received again a small allowance of milk, and the wearisome journey was resumed. Soon they arrived at a valley, which was obviously a home of these nomads. Here they were kept till midnight without food or water, and suffered many indignities at the hands of their keepers. At last a bowl of milk was given to each man, and they were allowed to snatch a few hours of sleep. In the morning they were allotted to different masters, and the Arabs moved off again. After seven days of travel they turned towards the sea shore and at their evening halt were met by two strangers who carried double-barrelled guns. It was clear that they came from a civilized part for they were dressed like townsmen. It turned out they were traders from Morocco. One of them, after a good deal of bargaining, bought Captain Riley from the Arab and also three of the crew.

Their new master had an old camel killed that evening, and gave his captives blood boiled to the consistency of liver, which was considered by the Arabs to be delicious food. The sailors thought differently. Lack of clothing had added to the men's misery, for by now they were all as naked as they were born, but their new master gave Riley a shirt, and the seamen contrived to cover themselves with an old blanket which was given to them.

The sailors now realized that they were slaves, sold into captivity, and had little hope of ever seeing their loved ones again. They had no means of communicating with anyone, but Captain Riley had concealed on his person a letter which he hoped would one day fall into the hands of a European.

They were now travelling along the sea shore, and had been nine days with their new master. He seemed better

disposed towards them and saw that they had food and were not bruised by riding camels bareback.

One night Riley saw him instructing one of his men about setting off on a journey and he wondered if the fellow was to make for civilized parts. He had nothing to bribe him with but the man had shown some consideration towards him at times on the march. He decided to risk it and the next morning before the man set off he tried to make him understand by signs that if he delivered a letter to one of Riley's compatriots he would be well rewarded. It was a difficult exercise in mime, for the man was some time understanding what was required of him. All Captain Riley could do was to press the letter into his hand—and hope. In it he had related the sufferings of himself and his crew and implored pity from the reader, whoever he might be.

The man set off and Captain Riley resigned himself to the bitter wait, hoping against hope that his letter would reach European hands.

Eight days later a rider was seen rapidly nearing the camp. The Arabs watched him approach, and to the surprise of Captain Riley they began to arm themselves and drive the camels into an enclosure. Soon the lone rider reached the camp and to the astonishment of the captain asked for him personally. Riley stepped forward and the rider saluted and handed him a sealed letter.

It bore his name and was from the British Consul at Mogador. He said he was sending an escort to bring him and his men to Mogador and was detaining the Arab who brought the letter as hostage. Evidently the Arab leader had received similar information for he now had meat and drink brought for Captain Riley and his crew. He also ordered one of his slaves to bring garments and lay before them, so that they might clothe themselves decently.

In less than a week the escort arrived and Captain Riley and his men were rescued. The Chief shook hands with them as they left, probably because he had seen

Europeans do this when they parted from each other. Arriving at the consulate at Mogador they were received by the British Consul, Mr Wiltshire, with the warmest kindness. He took them by the hand and welcomed them back to life and liberty.

They were in a pitiable state. Riley weighed only ninety pounds and one of the crew forty. It is difficult to believe that the spark of life could have remained in bodies so exhausted.

The story of these brave American seamen is nearly finished. After staying for some time in the house of the British Consul they sailed for their native land. Arriving home they had a warm public welcome. But some of the other members of the crew were never heard of again. Mr Wiltshire some time later managed to ransom three of them but several must have perished miserably in the desert or in an Arab camp as slaves.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ORDEAL OF SOLDIERS AT SEA

HAD you been walking down Fifty-Fifth Street, New York, on the morning of 27 September 1918 you would have seen the tenement windows brave with flags and bunting. Along the pavements excited women and children were grouped, with rattles, whistles, flags, and paper streamers—anything in fact with which to make a noise or a show.

Along the wharves at the western end of the street on the Hudson River lay a dozen fine ships—passenger ships by the look of them but now without the bright paint on funnels and hulls. Some were painted all over a drab grey and others sported irregular streakings of different shades and tints—war-time camouflage. Their funnels were caked with the salt of the sea spray flung up by storms in the Atlantic. Inside, these ships were stripped bare. The gay interiors had gone with everything else inflammable. They were mere shells.

At the end of the line lay H.M.S. *Otranto*, an armed merchant cruiser, her eight 6-inch guns spotless under their canvas coverings. Her duty was to see the others safely across to the battlefields of Europe.

Crowds blackened the wharves and their murmuring rose like the noise of the sea. But with the coming of a faint, distant sound, the sound of military music, their murmuring hushed. In the hush another noise made a background to the military music—the *swish swish*, *swish swish* of regularly marching feet. Here came the 'passengers' for the liners—a contingent of 'dough-boys'

bound for the battlefields of Western Europe. They were going to clean up the mess into which the Old World had allowed itself to fall. Their confidence in themselves was absolute.

At the last moment, when the convoy was about to warp out one by one, a fresh batch of soldiers arrived—eight hundred and fifty of them. Men were badly needed in Flanders. There was a hasty conference between officials and the captain of the *Otranto*, and he agreed to take them. To the screaming of sirens and hooters the convoy pulled out into the stream—thirteen ships in all. Perhaps an ominous number.

Just before casting off the captain had received disquieting news. The Nantucket Lightship had reported two enemy submarines in her vicinity—probably waiting for this particular convoy. There was a frown on his face as he paced the bridge. 'Ask the First Lieutenant to speak to me', he ordered the messenger at his side.

Number One quickly came, and the two officers passed into the chart room. They decided to take a different course from the usual one and the navigator set a course to the north. This meant taking the ships across the Newfoundland Banks. To avoid the human enemy they would have to risk a natural one—fog.

Once in the open sea the convoy was formed into three lines of four ships abreast and a brave sight they looked as they thrust the creaming North Atlantic from their bows. Off Cape Sable the ships ran into bad weather, which worsened daily. The troops were farmers and farm workers from Southern Georgia, many of whom had never seen the sea, and they began to suffer horribly from sea-sickness.

Then they struck fog. It lay low on the water, shrouding the hulls and leaving masts and funnels in sight. But there could be no diminution of speed. Each ship held fast to the compass-bearing of the leader. No lights were shown at night. Smoking on deck was forbidden. Dark, silent,

except for the splash and murmur of their own progress, the ships bore swiftly on.

The convoy had been four days out and three bells in the first watch had struck when the *Otranto* gave a sudden jolt, stopped for a second, then leaped ahead. She had hit something. The crash of broken timber and the fall of objects on the ship brought the troops rushing on deck. 'Keep below', yelled an officer.

There had been a collision, and cries could be heard coming from the open sea. The captain signalled the convoy to proceed at half speed. When they had cleared he ordered the searchlights to be switched on. It was a risky thing to do for the glare would advertise the presence of a fighting ship to lurking submarines.

In the blaze of the searchlight a ship stood in silver. One of her masts had gone by the board and the other was stripped as bare of yards as a flagpole. Nearby a boat tossed soggly, overladen with human cargo. The *Otranto* lowered her accident boat and within a short time the shipwrecked men were on board. They stood talking excitedly in a language no-one on board could understand. Then a quartermaster spoke.

'Them blokes seem to be slinging a lingo the same as Jock Ferguson and Bill McKay use when they're yarning.'

'Fetch one of them,' ordered the captain.

Jock Ferguson came along. He was a Fleet Reserve man from the Orkneys. He had little difficulty in understanding the shipwrecked men for they were Breton fishermen and Jock's Gaelic was akin to their speech.

'They take us for Germans, sir', said Jock to the captain. 'Tell 'em we're Britons.'

The next minute the Bretons threw out their arms, and each grabbed the nearest man to him, and hugged him and kissed him. They were in fisherman's rig and it was their habit to live in their clothes till they returned to Brittany. Their garments were thick with stale fish and

stank like stoats. This demonstration of affection was therefore something of an ordeal for the captain and crew.

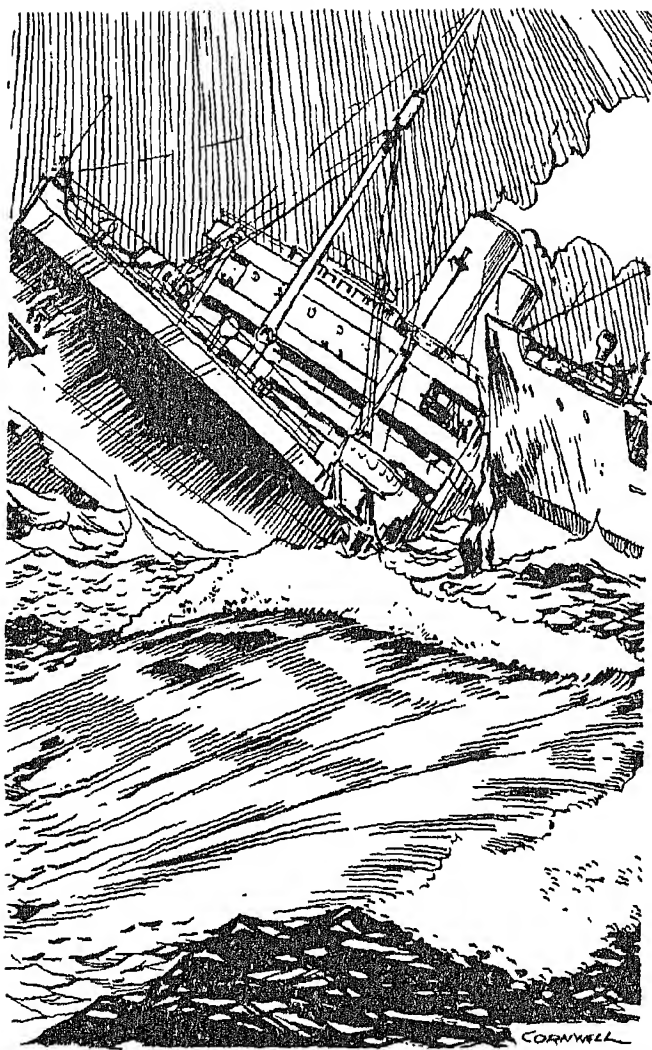
It seems that as they were far off the beaten track of shipping it was their custom to douse all lights and turn in each night till daybreak, hence the collision. Their boat was mostly of wood and might become derelict and, drifting with the current, become a menace to shipping. So the captain decided to sink her by gun fire. This was done and the *Otranto* sped after her charges. Next day she was in her position as leader.

Spanish flu was raging in most of the ships. The troops had brought the sickness from an afflicted camp. From most ships every morning came the signal 'Permission to stop engines for funeral'.

It was an extraordinary sickness for it seemed to rob the victims of all desire to go on living. The ships' doctors and the Army doctors, working day and night with hardly any rest, were worn to shadows. The captain of the *Otranto* himself was taken with it but, disobeying the doctor's orders, stuck to his duties for long spells. Two of her officers were babbling in sick bay. Hour by hour the glass dropped and the tempest whipped the sea with greater rage. On the evening of Sunday 6 October the storm seemed to have reached its climax. In the mountainous and broken seas three of the convoy had drifted out of line and disappeared. It had been expected that by now destroyers and planes would have met the convoy and escorted her into port, but the terrible weather made that almost impossible—certainly for aircraft.

It was highly probable that the convoy was off its course, for no sights had been possible for days, and the exact position of the fleet could not be determined. This was of course before the days of radar or other scientific aids to navigation.

Came Sunday morning with rain and heavy clouds. The captain had just left the bridge to snatch a hasty breakfast when the clouds lifted momentarily, giving the



The whole ship shuddered . . . there was a grinding and crashing of steel plates. . . .

officer on watch a glimpse of land ahead. He dispatched the midshipman of the watch at the run to report to the captain, who returned to the bridge at once.

The captain signalled the convoy to turn eight points to port. The wind almost blew the signal bunting to shreds. In the bad light of a grey dawn it is extremely difficult to distinguish colours—they all seem a dull monocolour. The *Kashmir* was the nearest ship to the *Otranto*. She altered course to starboard.

Immediately two blasts went up from *Otranto* indicating which way she was turning. They went unheard by the officer in the *Kashmir* owing to the clamour of the storm. *Kashmir* kept to her starboard turn. The two great ships swung closer and collision became inevitable.

Many of the American soldiers carried cameras and one of them asked permission of one of the *Otranto* officers to take a picture 'of the big ship coming close'.

It was too late to take a snap. On the crest of a huge wave was posed the axe-like bow of the *Kashmir*. Within a second she would strike down upon the *Otranto*. Nothing could avert a dreadful disaster. Next moment the blow fell. The whole ship shuddered as if in her death throes. With the grinding and crashing of steel plates as they were wrenched apart mingled the cries of crushed and tortured men. The sea threw the two ships apart, leaving the *Otranto* with a hole in her side twenty feet deep and sixteen feet across. The *Kashmir*, with her reinforced concrete bows, was almost unharmed.

Strictly in accordance with Admiralty regulations the other ships wheeled away and drove on their course, as if without a thought for the sinking ship they were leaving. The harsh rule that bade seamen leave their stricken comrades to their fate was necessary. So many good ships had been sacrificed to the enemy when standing by to rescue drowning crews that firm adherence to the principle of no attempt at life-saving was insisted upon.

Water was pouring into the *Otranto*. Her case seemed

hopeless. Perfect order none the less still held on board. The captain tried to turn her to make a lee for the breach but found the ship had no steerage-way. It was then that the engineer commander came and reported that the engine room was awash and pressure in the boilers rapidly diminishing. He had barely finished speaking when the sound of vast rending and tearing rose from the ship's bowels. Men came rushing on deck from below. The vessel gave a great lurch to starboard and it seemed to many it was to be her last plunge. 'There go the engine room bulkheads', said the engineer.

With that all lights went out. Escaping steam shrieked deafeningly. The personal bravery of one of the engineers below saved the ship from immediate destruction. He swam about the engine room opening and shutting the essential cocks to allow the steam to escape. But for his action the inrush of water to the boilers must have brought on an explosion.

All this time the troops had been standing at boat stations in absolute discipline. Their attitude appeared to be one of complete nonchalance. Water was now above their knees, but still they stood erect on duty.

Suddenly there was a screeching and tearing as the entire boat deck lurched over the side, carrying many men with it. The impact of the collision had shorn the fixing bolts as if they were putty, and the whole of the deck was merely resting on occasional supports. At any moment now the ship, pounded by the heavy seas, might break asunder and go down. The collision had carried away the wireless so no message could be sent. The rest of the convoy had disappeared and the *Otranto* lay alone, stricken to death, lashed at by hurricane blasts and swept by towering seas.

Then the miracle happened.

On the crest of a great wave off the starboard quarter appeared a British destroyer. The men on the sinking ship stared unbelievably: then a spontaneous cheer rose



Those who fell between the two ships
were crushed to death.

unanimously from all throats on board. The destroyer's commander signalled: 'Am coming alongside will use boats as fenders'.

The commander of that destroyer was prepared to bring his little ship of less than a thousand tons alongside the bulk of a ship ten times its size, a bulk that was out of control and water-logged.

With incomparable skill and daring the little vessel was brought near to the *Otranto*. She struck the boats lying in the sea alongside with a rending crash, and was swept alongside by an incoming wave.

'Jump, jump', yelled the men in the destroyer.

Seamen used to the motion of ships can exercise judgment in jumping. At times the deck of the destroyer would

rise to within six feet of *Otranto's* but in a second would have sunk to forty feet below. The American soldiers were unused to the ways of ships and jumped wildly.

Those who fell between the two ships were crushed to death as the waves forced the vessels together. Many leapt to safety however.

In spite of the damage done to her by the first contact the destroyer was brought alongside a second time. Then she stood off and signalled that a third trip could not be risked. All but two of her oil tanks were pierced, her wireless was carried away, and all her boats were smashed. She would endeavour to pick up any men she saw in the sea.

The destroyer then stood away from the sinking ship to make for Belfast her base. The *Otranto* was sinking fast. The men who remained on board chose to do so thinking she would eventually run ashore. A low sandy beach was seen off her port quarter.

There were now four hundred extra men aboard the destroyer. She was heavily laden and her deck was almost awash. The troops in the ship behaved splendidly. It must have been a terrible ordeal but they obeyed orders with a calm that was heroic. Ordered to go below as the weight on the deck rendered the ship unstable they tramped down and stood shoulder to shoulder in the manner of old seasoned soldiers. Having no wireless it was not until the destroyer entered Belfast Lough that the captain could inform the authorities of the disaster. A visual signal was sent that a shipwrecked crew was being brought in and by the time the destroyer was berthed ambulances were waiting to take the injured to Victoria Hospital. It was well past midnight and nobody had eaten since eight o'clock that morning. Men were weak from hunger and exposure. The troops were marched off to the Seamen's Home and soon were eating hot dogs and drinking hot coffee.

The destroyer that rescued the men from the *Otranto*

was H.M.S. *Mounsey*, and her captain was Lieutenant-Commander Craven, R.N. The manner in which he handled his ship and his amazing daring and the gallantry of his men resulted in some six hundred lives being saved. The British Government awarded him the Distinguished Service Order and the American Government paid him the highest honour they could by giving him the Distinguished Service Medal, equivalent to the Victoria Cross.

The loss of life was appalling. Of the five hundred-odd souls left in the big ship only sixteen got ashore. For days the bodies of the drowned men were hurled up the gullies and inlets that serrate the island. As they were recovered they were carried up and laid alongside other dead ship-mates. The island of Islay, for that was the scene of the disaster, went into mourning for two days. A funeral procession was formed with pipers at the head. To the keening notes of a lament, representatives of the Admiralty and the American Government followed. The island inhabitants almost to a man walked to the cemetery, where side by side American soldiers and British sailors were laid to rest. Beside them were buried the Breton fishermen rescued by the *Otranto* less than a week before.

The graveyard is on the western coast of Islay by the little village of Kilchoman. It is called the Otranto Cemetery. A monument stands there and this is the inscription.

This Cross of sacrifice is one in design and intention with those that have been set up in France and Belgium and other places throughout the world where our dead of the Great War are laid to rest.

Their name liveth for evermore.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MERCHANTMEN IN PERIL

At the outbreak of war many large British passenger liners were taken over by the Royal Navy. This possibility was envisaged when they were being built and certain parts of their structure were strengthened to enable heavy guns to be shipped on them. All their finery was stripped and the insides were mere shells. Painted a dull grey or camouflaged in odd designs they proudly flew the White Ensign of the Senior Service.

These ships did splendid work on patrol. They were captained by officers from the Navy and where possible the complement was made up of reservists already in the ship. This was indeed a fitting arrangement, for these men knew their ship and were honoured to be chosen to serve in her on war work.

The P. & O. ship *Jervis Bay* had been engaged for twenty years in the Australian trade carrying passengers, wool, frozen meat, and dairy produce to the home country. Fitted with eight six-inch guns, four on each side, she now took her place with the fighting units of the Royal Navy. No longer 'S.S.' she affixed the letters 'H.M.S.' to her name. Captain E. S. Fogerty Fegan, R.N., was in command and she was detailed for escort duty in the North Atlantic.

In October 1940 thirty-eight ships were lying in Halifax harbour laden with goods for Britain. They were waiting for an escort ship to convoy them across the Atlantic and H.M.S. *Jervis Bay* was sent on this errand. She arrived in Halifax on 20 October and a week later the convoy left for Great Britain. It is obvious that the speed of a convoy is the speed of the slowest

ship, and when one of the ships developed engine trouble and signalled 'permission to stop and repair engines' the chagrin of Captain Fegan can be imagined. It was imperative that this convoy should reach home as quickly as possible. There was only one thing to do—leave the 'lame duck' behind. He ordered her to fall out of line and effect repairs, then proceed as best she could. Eventually this ship arrived safely in Britain.

What a magnificent sight these ships made as they creamed the waters of the Atlantic from their bows. The convoy was made up of nine columns. Rear Admiral H. B. Maltby (Ret.) was commodore and his ship was the *Cornish City*. The escorting ship H.M.S. *Jervis Bay* was in the centre between the fourth and fifth column.

All the way across they had met good weather. Calm seas and a gentle wind and no enemy aircraft or submarines had been sighted. They had only two more days to go and they would be safely in port. Was the convoy going to be lucky? The leading ship of the sixth column was one belonging to the New Zealand Shipping Company—the *Rangitiki* commanded by Captain H. Barnett, R.N. On the afternoon of 5 November her look-out sighted smoke on the port bow. He reported to the bridge and Captain Barnett squinted through his binoculars and discerned a smudge of smoke which might be that of a steamer going east of north. Then another ship—the *Empire Penguin*—saw this smoke and at once informed the captain of the *Jervis Bay*.

Captain Fegan was well aware of this object and had been watching it for some time. He could take no action till he knew whether she was friend or foe. But he signalled the convoy to be prepared to 'scatter', then ordered them to turn eight points to starboard and continue zig-zagging in case enemy submarines were in the vicinity.

The smudge soon developed into a ship, approaching at some speed. Suddenly, when about ten miles away,



The *Jervis Bay* altered course towards the raider to attract her gunfire. . . .

two salvoes fell in the centre of the convoy. Captain Fegan rightly suspected that this oncoming ship was one of the German pocket battleships. He knew they had an armament of six eleven-inch guns which had an effective range of over ten miles. He was right, for as we now know she was the *Admiral Scheer*. He knew also that his meagre battery of six-inch guns stood a poor chance against the much heavier one of the approaching enemy ship. The obvious thing was to 'Cut and run'. But the job of men serving in the Royal Navy was to sink enemy ships, not run away from them.

The raider apparently thought she was on an easy catch for she did not fire again but drew closer. However she had not counted on the interpretation Captain Fegan gave to the word 'duty'.

Captain Fegan knew that the oncoming ship would make no mistake nor show any mercy. He signalled the convoy to 'scatter', dropping smoke screens until they were out of range of the raider's guns. At the same time he altered course towards the raider in order to attract her gunfire and thus give the convoy more time to get away. He knew that he had no chance of survival but continued to advance towards the powerful enemy. One ship in the convoy had been hit—the tanker *San Demetrio*—and shells were falling among the others as they sped away.

For some time the *Jervis Bay* was not in range with her guns. As soon as she was she opened fire but still her shells fell short of their target.

The shooting from the raider was good and salvo after salvo hit the *Jervis Bay*. Her steering gear was jammed, her wireless room was smashed, and she was on fire. Still she fought on. Havoc and destruction came with every salvo as she turned to bring her remaining guns to bear on the enemy. Fifteen long minutes this awful punishment continued, and now she was a blazing hell of death. She was slowly sinking, but

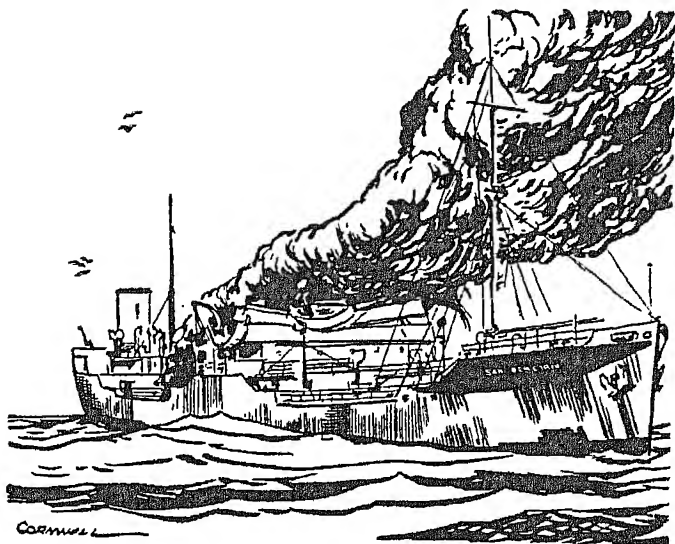
it seemed as if the raider was intent on finishing her murderous task. So long as the *Jervis Bay* was afloat she offered a target and drew fire which otherwise would have been directed at the ships of the convoy.

It does not need much imagination to picture the terrible plight of her crew. Her plates were red hot and glowing and the black figures on her deck showed up like silhouettes against the glaring steel. But that thirty minutes of certain death and destruction saved the convoy. When Captain Fegan saw that all the ships were well away he gave orders to 'Abandon Ship'. There was not a boat fit to be lowered to the water. Only four rafts remained that would float. These were flung overboard and the remainder of her gallant crew leapt overboard after them.

The action was over but the sacrifice was not made in vain. The 'few' had given their all, that the 'many' might live on. Thirty-three ships of that convoy escaped destruction. There would probably not have been a single survivor from the *Jervis Bay* but for the quiet heroism of Captain Olander of the *Sureholm*. He saw the ship sinking and at once headed back to the scene of action. It was a tremendous risk, but he managed to reach the *Jervis Bay* and rescued sixty-five officers and men, the only survivors of one of the most heroic and significant actions ever fought.

Well covered by their smoke screens many of the convoy made their escape. Most of them had turned south-east. The raider set off after them leaving the *Jervis Bay* to her fate. Unfortunately the *Rangitiki* was spotted because her funnels showed above her smoke screen. At once the raider opened fire on her but registered no direct hit, though she was damaged by flying shell splinters.

The fearless conduct of Captain Fegan well deserved the posthumous V.C. awarded to him. His action saved countless lives and many valuable ships and their cargoes. It is a tangible tribute to him and his



The *San Demetrio*, loaded with motor spirit,
was set on fire. . . .

crew that a total of 190,000 tons of cargo reached Britain in that convoy. Of the thirty-eight ships that left Halifax, thirty-one came home. Three turned tail at the sight of the raider and doubled back to Halifax.

There is a remarkable story to tell, too, about another of the ships in that convoy. The *San Demetrio* was loaded with motor spirit and was set on fire by the raider when the first salvo was fired. When fire broke out Captain George Waitc, because of the added danger on account of her inflammable cargo, gave orders to 'Abandon Ship'. Boats were lowered and all the crew managed to escape in them. One of the boats carried the captain and twenty-two of the crew. This was picked up the next morning and the occupants were landed safely in St. John's, Newfoundland. Fifteen

men in another boat, including the Second Officer, A. C. Hawkins, met their ship two days later still afloat, and apparently the fire had subsided. They decided to get on board again and see what could be done to save her and her valuable cargo. When, after many attempts, they managed to board her they found that at last the fire was almost out, and in a few minutes it was completely doused. What was the next move?

The engineer scrambled down the smashed fiddley into the engine room. He came up and reported that full repairs were impossible but he thought he might get the main engines running. He and his men set to work on the engines. It was ten long hours before they could report progress. He decided they might try to put the steam through it—'just to see what happens', he said. The engine remained static for a few minutes then she began to 'cough'. In a short time she was turning almost normally. Steam was raised and once again she set off. But enemy shells had destroyed the compass and binnacle. This did not deter Mr Hawkins. He steered in a fashion known to seamen as 'by guess and by God'.

The crippled ship plodded along hoping to reach the west coast of Ireland. In eight days she made over a thousand miles—not a bad achievement for a disabled ship. Eventually she was brought into the Clyde under R.A.F. escort and actually discharged her own cargo—eleven thousand tons of petrol—through her own pipes.

One more tale of an armed merchant cruiser.

Within one month of the outbreak of the second World War the P. & O. liner *Rawalpindi* was converted into a fighting ship. She was engaged on the Northern patrol intercepting and identifying any ship met in the Greenland-Denmark Strait. Captain E. C. Kennedy was in command. She was one of the first ships to patrol this highly dangerous part of the northern seas. Incidentally she was the first armed merchant cruiser to meet the challenge of the enemy ships.

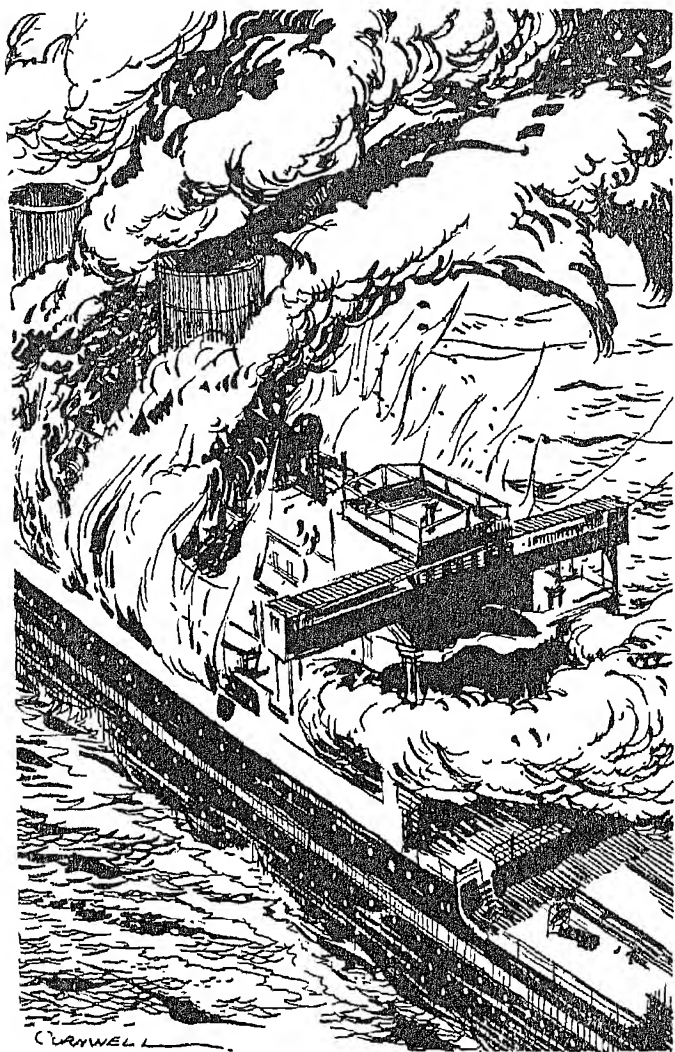


'I think she's the *Scharnhorst*!'

It was the afternoon of 23 November 1939 and the wintry day was waning. A bitter wind blew and the sea was criss-cross and lumpy. Suddenly the look-out sighted a vessel off the starboard bow. He at once reported it to Captain Kennedy on the bridge, who examined it through his glasses. After long and careful scrutiny he turned to his first lieutenant.

'I think she's the *Scharnhorst*. Sound action stations.'

The order was passed and the men at the guns stripped off top gear, and saw to the mechanism. The German cruiser came to within three miles of the *Rawalpindi* and signalled her to heave to. Realizing the hopelessness of joining action with such a powerful foe Captain Kennedy rang the engine room for all speed possible and endeavoured to escape into the gloom and shadow



The first salvo from the *Scharnhorst* fell on the boat deck.

of dusk, as a fog was creeping down on him from the south. The *Scharnhorst* saw his intention and altered course to get right in her way. She again signalled the message 'Heave to'. At that moment the look-out sighted another ship to the starboard. Captain Kennedy, thinking it might be a companion ship on patrol, steered in her direction. On nearing her he saw to his consternation she was the German cruiser *Gneisenau*. Captain Kennedy opened fire on both ships. His shells fell short of the *Scharnhorst* but he scored a direct hit on the *Gneisenau*. Both cruisers then set about the *Rawalpindi*. The first salvo from the *Scharnhorst* fell on the boat deck, killing most of the men on the bridge. Then a salvo from the *Gneisenau* hit the main control room killing everyone there and putting all communications with the heavy armaments out of action. Seeing this, Captain Kennedy sent a Chief Petty Officer to each gun informing the officers in charge what had happened, and telling them to fire independently.

By this time his ship was on fire, so Captain Kennedy ordered a smoke screen to be laid. While he was superintending this he was killed.

It was getting dark but the two cruisers still blazed away. Then a salvo hit the ship in the magazine. With a terrific explosion she broke in two and slowly sank.

Only two boats were in a condition to float and carry passengers, the others had all been smashed to pieces. These two were lowered and twenty-seven survivors got away in them. The German cruiser *Scharnhorst* picked up five out of the sea but ignored those in the boats and left them to their fate.

Next morning H.M.S. *Chitral*, who had picked up the messages for assistance, arrived on the scene. She found the boats but the survivors were frozen stiff after being sixteen hours in an open boat, on a wintry sea, in that cold Northern latitude.

CHAPTER NINE

THE LION AND THE JACKAL

THE fact that Britain is an island is both a menace and protection for her. It is a protection because no enemy can set foot on her shores so long as she has a Navy. It becomes a menace in war time. There are over fifty million people to feed and Britain cannot grow enough food to do it. She must rely on foodstuffs brought from overseas. In times of peace this is simple and merchant ships carry the necessary foodstuffs along the trade routes, but in war things take on a very ugly aspect. The enemy are fully aware that a starving nation is a beaten one and so use every effort to prevent those ships from arriving home with the much needed food.

It is up to the Royal Navy to police and patrol these routes, and as there are 85,000 miles of them it is an almost superhuman job. The life-lines must be kept clear of attacks from the air, on the sea, and beneath it that Britain may live.

Three months after the Second World War started it was found that ships known to have left Australia and New Zealand with cargoes of frozen meat and dairy produce had not arrived at their home ports. On investigation it was clear that a fast raider was working in the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The British Navy had ships stationed in various parts of the world whose job it was in peace time to assist merchant ships and show the flag. In war their job became more strenuous: sinking enemy ships, interning

them in neutral ports, and helping British ships to reach home with their valuable cargoes.

The particular station that comes into this story was the West Indian. This was under the command of Commodore (later Rear-Admiral) Harwood. The ships under his command were H.M.S. *Exeter*, his flagship, the *Ajax*, *Achilles*, and the *Cumberland*. The *Exeter* was an older and slower ship, so Harwood decided to transfer his flag to *Ajax* on account of her extra speed. The disposition of the ships was as follows. The *Ajax* patrolled the east coast of South America from the West Indies to Pernambuco. From there the *Exeter* took on as far south as Montevideo, and the *Achilles* patrolled from the River Plate to Cape San Antonio. H.M.S. *Cumberland* policed the stretch between South America and the Falkland Islands.

Admiral Harwood had been warned by the Admiralty of the activities of this raider and was instructed to keep a sharp look-out for her. The South Atlantic Ocean is a vast expanse of water and to find a single ship in it was rather like looking for the legendary needle, but tracked down she was, and this is how it was managed.

On the morning of 3 December the look-out aboard the *Ajax* spotted a ship close inshore making south. On receiving this report the captain ordered her to 'heave to'. She took no notice of his signal. The *Ajax* fired a shot across her bows. That did the trick. At once she stopped engines and hove to. By this time the boarding party were in the boat and soon the boarding officer was climbing up the Jacob's Ladder. At once he demanded to be taken to the captain.

The ship proved to be the *Ussukuma*, belonging to the German African Line, and the boarding officer, who had spent most of his sea life in the merchant service, asked to see her manifest. The manifest is a complete list of all cargo carried, and to a naval reserve officer

who had served many years in cargo ships it was an open book. Quickly the officer scanned the sheets.

'I'd like to see the contents of this package', he said and pointed to the manifest.

'It is impossible', replied the captain, and the officer detected a look of dismay on his face.

'Get it on deck as soon as possible.'

Meanwhile a search party had been examining the ship. She was certainly kept spruce and clean but the crew were obstructive and did all they could to make things difficult for the searchers.

At last the case in question was taken from Number Two hold and landed on deck.

'Open it up', ordered the officer.

With scowls on their faces two seamen prised it open. The officer quickly took out some of the contents and gave a whistle of surprise.

Turning to the signalman standing by his side he said, 'Ask the Naval Intelligence Officer to come across at once.'

In a short time that officer was combing the contents of the case. It was indeed a 'find', for it contained gadgets that were obviously meant for a type of German ship—the pocket battleship. The *Ussukuma* was evidently a supply ship for one of them. Finding the game was up the German captain admitted the charge, and he and his crew were at once taken across to the *Ajax*. The *Ussukuma* was sunk by gunfire.

Before leaving the German ship the officer took all the charts from the locker. That night in the wardroom of the *Ajax* these charts were carefully studied for any chance notes or indications of the ship's future movements. They seemed to be the ordinary charts issued to merchant ships. Suddenly one of the group who was scanning a chart of the South Atlantic saw a mark that he thought might prove interesting. It was so small that he picked up the magnifying glass on the

table and peered through it. His heart gave a leap. It was a tiny red cross, hardly observable with the naked eye.

'Here, chaps, what do you make of this?' he said exultantly.

All took a look at this small red cross. Then one said, 'Is our luck in? Do you suppose that's the rendezvous for that supply ship we just sunk and the raider?'

The officers set about calculating speeds and distances. The speed of the supply ship would be about twelve knots. They plotted a line from the spot where she was sunk to the small red cross two hundred miles east of the Cape San Antonio in central Argentine. She should have reached there in ten days' time.

But where was the raider? Certainly the navy now possessed valuable information but that was only half the story. To make full use of it they must know something about the movements of the vessel which the *Ussukuma* was going to meet. The next morning the wireless operator was twisting the knobs hoping to pick up some information when he heard a loud crackling on the earphones and an urgent cry for help: 'S O S S O S Eo6 15 S2o 10 Gunned by raider, gunned by raider. *Doric Star*', then silence.

He sent this message along at once to the bridge and the navigating officer got busy. He pinned the captured chart on the table. The captain was standing by.

'Where is the raider?' he asked.

'Off South West Africa, sir', replied the officer. 'Here's her position', and he pin-pointed the spot on the chart.

To know exactly where the supply ship was on 3 December, and where the raider was the next day, and also the rendezvous, gave all the necessary information, and in a short time the captain and officers determined that the *Ussukuma* and the raider were meeting at this place in the early morning of 13 December.

The other ships were informed and told what they

might expect to meet on that morning. Captain Woodhouse believed in letting all his men know what was happening.

On the morning of 11 December the *Exeter* steamed into Montevideo for mails. As she entered the harbour her captain saw a French cargo ship anchored close by. He turned to the officer of the watch who was standing on the bridge with him.

'That's the same type of ship as the *Ussukuma*, isn't it?'

'Yes, sir', said the officer, 'all those continental ships are built much the same.'

This reply set the captain thinking. Admiral Harwood had not yet changed his flag to *Ajax* and was still on board *Exeter*, so after a short conversation a signal was sent to the French ship asking her captain to come aboard *Exeter*.

The ship was the *Formose*, and her captain informed the Admiral that she was bound for Valparaiso. The Admiral sat pensive for some minutes, then said:

'Captain, I shall have to alter your orders slightly. See here', he drew out the chart. 'You will leave this port at midnight on the 12th and steam for this spot. Make a note of it.' It was the red cross of the rendezvous. 'You have an average speed of twelve knots, eh?'

'That is so.'

'You should make this spot at daybreak on the 13th.'

The Frenchman agreed.

'Keep a sharp look-out on your port bow as you approach the place', continued the Admiral. 'If you sight a smudge of smoke coming from the north-east put your helm hard over and clear off as fast as you can to the Straits of Magellan. On no account try to see what ship it is.'

The French captain looked mystified, but he saw how serious the Admiral was. With a bow he left the cabin, and returned to his ship. That night the *Formose* steamed out of Montevideo harbour into the darkness. To the

north-east some hundred-odd miles away the raider was speeding to her rendezvous. Her engineer Paul Ascher had daily reiterated to Captain Langsdorff the urgent need for re-fuelling, and now they were within sight of plenty, for in a few hours they should meet their supply ship.

Day was breaking on the morning of 13 December. It was almost mid-summer in that part of the globe and except for a heavy ground swell the sea was calm. The sun rose suddenly above the horizon as the *Formose* steamed on. She was unarmed and without escort. At the bidding of an English officer this French captain had fearlessly faced an unknown peril. He had no idea what to expect when he reached the spot indicated on his chart.

Suddenly the drowsiness of the summer morning was broken by the clang of a bell and a call from the look-out, 'Smoke on the port bow.'

The captain picked up his binoculars and searched the horizon. Yes, there was a shapeless smudge. He watched it intently for some minutes. Whatever ship it was, she was coming quickly into the picture. He rapped out an order to the man at the engine-room telegraph.

'Half speed ahead.'

The ship slowed down. The smudge had now assumed shape and it was clear to the Frenchman that the oncoming ship was no friendly merchantman but in outline a dull grey mass and he gave a start when he discerned heavy guns on her foc'sle.

'Bout ship, engines at full speed,' he ordered, and the *Formose* sped away out of the picture.

The oncoming ship was the raider *Graf Spee*. Her captain Hans Langsdorff sighted the *Formose* and naturally concluded it was his supply ship. He was watching her closely when he saw her turn, and as she drew broadside on he realized she was not the *Ussukuma*. His heart

missed a beat. What ship was she? Should he sink her before she got away? While he was considering what action to take the look-out called, 'Ships on the port beam'. Through his glasses he saw the two tall thin masts of H.M.S. *Exeter*. He was trapped. But Langsdorff was a fighter. He fought at Jutland as a midshipman and had served twenty-seven years in the German Imperial Navy. But the *Graf Spee* was not a fighting ship. She was firstly a commerce raider. His motto was always 'Raid and run'. To date he had been very successful.

He rang down to the engine room the signal 'Full steam ahead on both engines.' Then he sounded 'Action Stations'. A tattoo of hastening feet rang through the ship. The crew consisted of many German youths and they had been told many times by Captain Langsdorff that they would never be called on to fight. They were quite accustomed to going to 'General Quarters' on sighting a ship but 'Action Stations' was different—it meant 'action'. News ran round that the British Navy was in sight. Langsdorff knew that his ship had immensely stronger armament than the *Exeter*. He rang for 'economic speed', for he knew he was woefully short of fuel, and opened fire just as the *Ajax* and *Achilles* hove in sight.

As the ships approached each other the *Graf Spee* had by far the longer range with her eleven-inch guns, so he turned her and gave the *Exeter* a broadside. (An eleven-inch gun throws a shell weighing 670 lb. an effective distance of twelve miles, so the whole armament of six of these guns could hurl nearly two tons of steel and high explosive that distance.) The shooting of the enemy was indeed good, for the first salvo hit the *Exeter*. She was badly damaged, so much so that in less than half an hour she was practically out of the action. But the two smaller ships ranged on either side of the raider as she made for Montevideo and peppered her with their six-inch guns.

All that afternoon the fight went on. Had either of

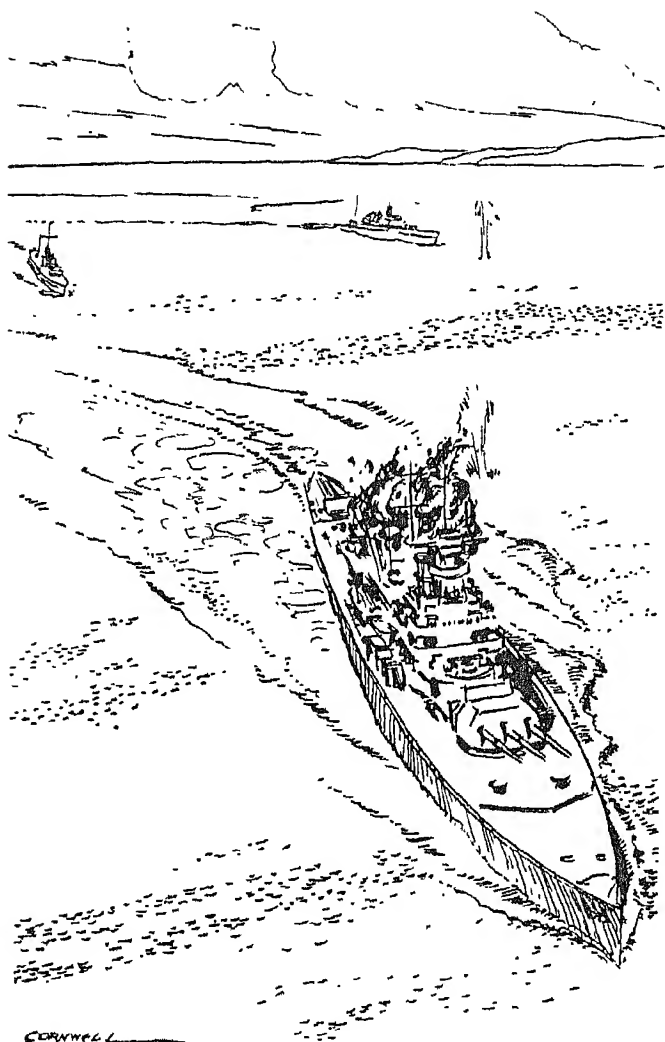
these ships received a direct hit it would have been annihilated. They plugged away under smoke screens and hampered the big ship as much as possible, hoping to hold her up so that the *Exeter* could deal with her with the eight-inch guns she carried. They did not know that the *Exeter* was out of the fight.

Perhaps those members of the crew who have the hardest task are the men in the engine-room. Working below the water line, they can see nothing of the action. Those in the turrets and on deck have the excitement of watching the fall of their shells, and they can see the movements of the other ships, thus finding emotional relief from the actual tension of the engagement, but very little of this can reach the men in the engine-room. Certainly loud speakers were laid on and an officer on the bridge was told off to pass information of how things were going to the men below, but in the heat of action there was time to relay very little. All they knew was that at any moment the deck plates might suddenly bulge in a queer way and the next moment there would be a terrific explosion, followed by an inrush of sea water.

A dull thud told them the ship had been hit by enemy missiles, a sudden flash and lurch told them their ship had fired a salvo of her big guns. They could only visualize her movements and—hope.

Inside the gun turrets men stripped to the waist, or wearing old dungarees and pyjamas, toiled and sweated amid the stench of acrid cordite smoke, singing, shouting, swearing, but responding to orders with instant obedience and magnificent team work.

Early in the afternoon a shell from *Ajax* tore into the control tower of the *Graf Spee*. It killed over thirty-five of her gunnery experts and put the main armament—the eleven-inch guns—out of action. Langsdorff was getting scared, for he was running very short of fuel. This was not his only trouble. The youths who were



A shell from *Ajax* tore into the control room
of the *Graf Spee*.

supposed to be firing the secondary armament of 5.9 inch guns refused to carry on, and lay about the deck almost dead with fright at the noise of the guns, and sick at the sight of blood.

The fact that these heavy guns were silenced was the salvation of the two small British ships. With this menace removed they could take more decisive action. The *Ajax* reached a speed of thirty-eight knots and held it. The men in the engine-room took no notice whatever of the pressure gauges, which could only register up to two hundred pounds to the square inch. More oil was pumped into the flames and the actual pressure these boilers stood will never be known.

The light was beginning to fail as the raider approached the Uruguayan shores. The British cruisers took every advantage of this, and hugged the shore side of the entrance so that to a large extent they were invisible to the enemy. The *Graf Spee* was silhouetted against the setting sun and made a fine target. It was clear from the raider's faltering gunfire that she had had enough. Slowly she slipped into the port of Montevideo and neutrality.

The news had got round that a fight was taking place outside the harbour and the whole of the waterfront was packed with people. Special trains had been run from outlying places and charabancs were arriving hourly with more crowds. Anyone lucky enough to have a house on the wharf with a flat roof could demand any price for seats.

The raider was safe for twenty-four hours. According to International Law any fighting ship could obtain this respite to enable her to repair wounds and take in supplies and fresh water. She was not permitted to repair any damage to her armaments. Her aircraft was badly damaged and this she could not touch. Her smashed control tower must be left as it was when she dropped anchor in harbour. But the ship could be made

seaworthy. Langsdorff procured two naval architects from shore who were prepared to state that the ship needed at least seventy-two hours to get ready for sea. Officials could not go against the considered opinion of these experts, so extra time was granted.

Next morning the bodies of the members of the crew killed in action were taken ashore in coffins and given a full naval funeral. The ceremony was attended by the English captains who had been prisoners in the raider. They were now free men on neutral soil. They stood at the salute as the coffins were lowered into a common grave.

The following morning launches were seen entering the harbour towing barges. The barges ranged alongside the *Graf Spee*. Soon welding flares were seen and it was obvious that the raider was repairing her battle damage. This was a contravention of International Law, and the British Consul lodged a complaint with the President. He at once ordered officials to go aboard the raider and put a stop to this. This was done and work ceased. It was a great blow to Langsdorff. He knew only too well that the British ships waiting outside were busy making good their war scars. But he had to submit or risk internment for the rest of the war.

The following morning—Saturday—Langsdorff went ashore to speak on the 'phone to the Führer. At the German Consulate he ordered everyone out of the building. He was not going to risk being overheard. There were spies all over the place. He need not have taken all that trouble for the line had been tapped in Belgium and the message passed to the Admiralty at Whitehall.

As he walked down the steps of the building he seemed to have aged twenty years. His step had lost its spring and his face was haggard and grey. He had been ordered by Hitler to do two things—one no honest man would do and the other no sailor would do. Arriving on board

his ship he gave orders for everyone to be mustered on deck.

'Men', he said, 'I have just been speaking to your Führer.'

They all sprang to the Nazi salute.

'Yes', he went on 'and he has ordered me to take this ship out and finish the fight. There are no big ships outside, only the three we nearly crippled yesterday.'

He waited for the cheers but a strange commotion took place. The youths started shouting, 'We're not going to fight, we're not going to fight', and soon the majority of the crew were shouting with them. They behaved like a group of hysterical schoolgirls.

There was a German ship lying close by named the *Tacoma*. She was interned. He signalled her to come alongside his ship. It took some time to shift her moorings and meanwhile the crew on deck held excited meetings and feelings rose high. At last the *Tacoma* was in position. Langsdorff ordered silence and went on:

'Alongside is the *Tacoma*. As you all know she is interned. Any of you who would like to leave the *Graf Spee* before I take her out to finish the fight may go aboard. But remember as soon as you set foot in her you will be interned for the rest of the war. You will not be able to lift a finger for your Fatherland or your Führer.'

He may have expected his men to jump to the Nazi salute and cheer. There was a mad rush below, and in a few minutes men and boys were struggling with their gunny sacks on their shoulders to get aboard that ship as fast as possible. Langsdorff stood watching the scene and the tears streamed down his cheeks. For two hours this exit went on. When all had left who wished to desert, he had the remainder counted. There were one hundred and twenty-three in all, most of them reservists who came from the Imperial Navy.

Langsdorff set about getting the ship under way.

The loyal men were disposed to the departments necessary to effect this.

The crowd of lookers-on ashore got a tremendous thrill.

'Look', they cried, 'smoke is coming out of her funnels. She is going out to fight.' They heard the clank-clank of the anchor chain as it passed through the hawse pipe into the chain locker.

'He's off', the people shouted as the water astern churned up with the thrash of her propellers.

Slowly the great ship moved from her anchorage. She steamed east for a short time, then abruptly turned south.

'He's making for Buenos Aires', the crowd said.

Then the miracle happened. From out of the blue came launches, motor boats, and tugs, and made for the *Graf Spee* at full speed. Soon she was surrounded by them. Ropes and Jacob Ladders were flung over the side and the few members of her crew swarmed down them into the waiting crafts. The last man to leave was Langsdorff.

At once the small ships made away from the *Graf Spee*. They had scarcely got a hundred yards from her when a deep explosion was heard. Still the small craft sped on their way to Buenos Aires. After a third explosion a huge pall of smoke lay on the surface of the River Plate. The people ashore held their breath in astonishment. They heard further shattering explosions as the flames reached the ship's magazines for she was now a mass of flames. As the wind shifted the pall of smoke, there she lay. The pride of the German Navy had perished. The water seethed round her, the smoke pall seemed to mingle with the dark clouds above as if to hide her shame.

As Captain Langsdorff looked back at her he must have realized that this action, which was one of the orders he had received from the Führer, would leave

an indelible blot upon the traditions of the sea. Still the small boats sped on and were soon in the port of Buenos Aires.

There is no doubt Langsdorff was a broken man. As he stepped off the launch all he could say was, 'I've saved the men, I've saved them.'

That evening when he went to bed he told his officers he was very tired. 'Don't call me in the morning. I'll come down when I've rested. I want a long, long sleep.'

Noon the next day came with no sign of the captain. His officers went to his room and listened outside his door. They could hear nothing. A knock received no reply. A louder one, and yet another, still went unnoticed. A shoulder to the door, a heavy thrust, and the door flew open.

On the floor of the room was spread the flag of the Imperial German Navy—not the Nazi flag. Under it lay the body of Captain Langsdorff with a bullet through his brain. He was a fine seaman, a fine enemy, and a man who understood the 'brotherhood of the sea'. The second order he received from Hitler was to take the ship with her full complement of men and sink her with her crew. Also he was to sink her in the fairway where she would be a menace to the ships of friend or foe till she was removed. He would not do these things. He gave his men a chance of saving their lives. He took the ship out of the shipping route and sank her in the shallows where she lies today, no danger to shipping but a battered wreck. That is the story of the Lion.

Hunters tell us that in the forests of Central Africa the lion reigns as king of beasts. He usually has a hanger-on who lives on the leavings and acts to some extent as a scavenger. The *Graf Spee* had a scavenger, the *Altmark*, who accompanied her on many of her raids. She took off stores from the captured ships and housed the many prisoners. She left the *Graf Spee* on 7 December.

Her Captain J. S. Dau was given the difficult task of getting back to Germany with more than three hundred prisoners on board.

Every British ship was alerted to assist in the hunt for this jackal, and a complete description was distributed to all shipping. Captain Dau was a skilled seaman. He was also an expert at disguising his ship. He would change her name, and run up a false ensign to allay suspicion. At different times she was known to have sailed under the names of the *Chirqueue* and the *Hangsund*, and she carried about a dozen neutral flags to run up when occasion demanded.

On leaving the *Graf Spee* the *Altmark* steamed south and made for the Antarctic. She loitered in these deserted waters for more than a fortnight, during which time she picked up the news of the sinking of the *Graf Spee*. The prisoners were having a tough time. Their rations were insufficient and they were crowded together with little room for comfort. She was a tanker, and these ships are constructed to carry fuel cargo, so the holds are small—almost like boxes, for liquid cargo is dangerous unless confined in small spaces. The officers were quartered in the ammunition lockers and had to sleep on the bare deck. The seamen as well as the officers were kept closely locked-up for most of the time—except for forty-five minutes each morning and thirty minutes each evening, when they were allowed on deck in carefully supervised parties for some exercise.

Being seamen the prisoners could in some way work out what was happening to the ship. On 28 December it became evident that something was afoot. She ceased to loiter and headed north again.

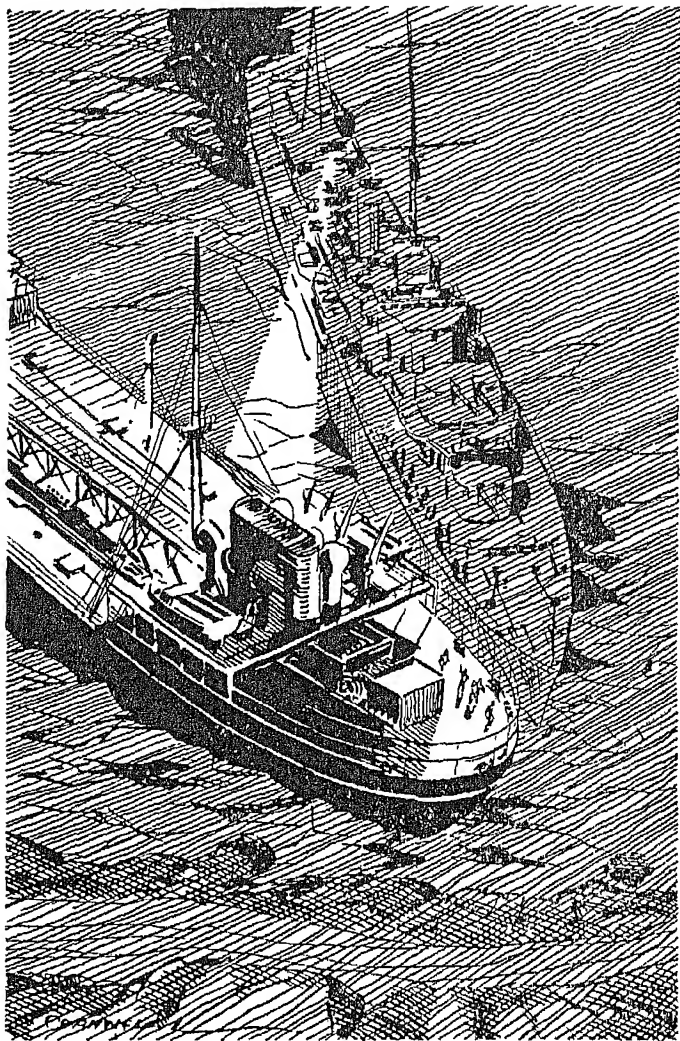
The *Altmark* was a fast ship and on occasions reached a speed that the prisoners estimated to be about thirty knots. Captain Dau now had to take great risks. He was very short of fuel so he shipped the flag of Panama and entered the port of Dakar. Here he obtained the

needed fuel and supplies. It was clear to the prisoners that Dau was at his wits' end where to turn. This was confirmed by the fact that he recrossed the Atlantic and skulked around the Banks of Newfoundland. From there he proceeded to Iceland, evidently making for the coast of Norway.

His ship had now been away from the *Graf Spee* for two months. On 14 February she was spotted by a Norwegian ship, the *Trygg*, outside the Trondheimsfjord north of Frohavet. The Norwegian captain demanded to see her papers and, since the *Altmark* was now sailing under her true colours, the documents were all in order and it was impossible to insist upon a search of the vessel.

But while the Norwegian captain was inspecting her papers the British seamen staged a demonstration. The Germans doused all the lights in the hope of silencing them but still the racket went on. They then drenched the prisoners with hose pipes and turned on the winches to drown the noise. The Norwegian officer seemed to find nothing unusual in hearing men singing and shouting, or perhaps he was deliberately ignoring it. At any rate the *Altmark* was allowed to proceed on her way. For this demonstration the prisoners were put on bread and water. Within twenty-four hours another Norwegian naval vessel demanded right of inspection. Dau refused permission and was merely warned against using his wireless and allowed to proceed again.

Next day she was spotted by the Gladiator planes of Coastal Command, and the game was up. Dau was tempted to use his anti-aircraft guns but he realized that this was too much to expect the neutral Norwegians to stand. Dau knew at once that he was in danger and took refuge in the Joessing Fjord, from which he could not get out without passing H.M.S. *Intrepid*, which had now been joined by H.M.S. *Cossack* commanded by Captain P. L. Vian.



As the *Cossack* drew alongside the two
ships almost collided.

Two Norwegian warships now appeared on the scene and strongly objected to the presence of the *Cossack*. But Captain Vian said he had reason to believe that the *Altmark* was carrying many British prisoners. He said he had no desire to infringe neutrality regulations and would be quite content if the *Altmark* was escorted into Bergen harbour and properly inspected there. This offer was refused, and Captain Vian had to withdraw outside the territorial limit. He did not stay there for long. He reported the position to the Admiralty by wireless and received this message in reply:

'Admiralty to Cossack. Get the men.'

Back went the *Cossack* into neutral waters, ignoring the two Norwegian gunboats who registered their protests. They might have been more responsive had they seen a few months ahead, when Hitler invaded Norway.

Captain Vian ordered a boarding party to be ready under Commander B. T. Turner. The searchlights were turned full on and at midnight the *Cossack* proceeded into the Joessing Fjord. She found the *Altmark* had run aground. As the *Cossack* drew alongside her she broke free and the two ships almost collided. This was Commander Turner's opportunity. The grappling irons were thrown aboard the *Altmark* and made fast. Over went Turner followed by the boarding party, and a remarkable engagement took place. The crew of the *Altmark* were unarmed and the British sailors did not use their arms. A free-for-all fist-fight took place and resulted in a complete British victory.

Captain Dau now appeared on the scene, bursting with indignation. He demanded to know the reason for this intrusion and denied there were any British prisoners in his ship. But his words were proved false as soon as the men from the *Cossack* had broken open one of the hatch covers, and shouted:

'Any British here?'

The shout they received in reply will ring in their ears for a long time.

But the fight was not yet over. Several men from the *Altmark* managed to escape over the stern and made for the shore. They had taken rifles with them and opened fire.

This was too much for the released prisoners. Grabbing some of the rifles from the men of the *Cossack* they returned the fire. The escaped men, after two had been shot, gave in and returned to the ship.

The rescue was only just in time. Captain Dau had planned to blow up his ship with all the prisoners batted below after he and his crew had escaped over the frozen fjord. Commander Turner was just in time to discover the time bomb.

The *Cossack* steamed for Leith and arrived there on 17 February. She received a warm welcome there and from the people of Edinburgh. The imagination of British people everywhere had been stirred by this action and that of the River Plate at a time when there was very little to encourage them in the progress of the war.

CHAPTER TEN

THE SAGA OF THE *FLYING ENTERPRISE*

ON Christmas Day 1952 the U.S. freighter *Flying Enterprise* left Hamburg bound for New York. As her name implies she was a cargo ship but like many others she occasionally carried a few passengers. On this voyage there were ten in the ship. She was commanded by Captain Kurt Carlsen and her crew consisted of forty hands.

The passage across the North Sea and down the English Channel had been uneventful but on reaching the Lizard the weather worsened. Captain Carlsen did not like the way the barometer was falling, it betokened a storm. And it was not far off, for the wind increased to gale strength, and by nightfall it was evident that a hurricane was on the way. By noon the next day it was at its fiercest and Captain Carlsen decided to heave-to till it blew itself out.

The ship's carpenter was going his rounds that morning and on taking soundings he found a considerable amount of water in number three hold. He reported this to Captain Carlsen, who at once made a personal inspection. This was grave news.

'Where's all this water coming from, Chippy?' he asked as he looked at the sounding rod.

'I can't find any reason for it, sir. She's taking 'em green over the foc'sle but I can't find a leak in the hatch coaming.'

The expression 'taking 'em green' is the sailor's way of saying that instead of wind-driven spray, actual

waves are sweeping over the ship. A huge wave would curl over the bow and tons of water would rush into the well-deck. It would go hard with any man on that deck taken unawares, he would be swept over the side like a cork. Life-lines are placed along the decks in bad weather so that men passing on duty can grab these and hang on till the rush of water is passed.

The two men made a careful examination of the coaming of the hatch but could find no leakage. In the minds of both there was possibly another reason but neither liked to refer to it. Supposing that under the terrific strain of the storm she had sprung some of her plates? The rivets might have snapped off, leaving a gaping hole through which water could pour.

If the ship was taking in water from sprung plates, or the cargo had shifted, she was in grave peril. As the day passed Carlsen noticed that the list was slowly increasing. He decided to tell his passengers the state of affairs. Calling a steward he told him to assemble them in the saloon. When all were there he said:

'Gentlemen, I'm sorry to tell you my ship is showing signs of strain. She has sprung a leak and, as you can all see, is listing badly. I don't wish to alarm you unduly but I must warn you to be ready to leave her at a moment's notice if necessary. I want to assure you that everything is being done to avert disaster.'

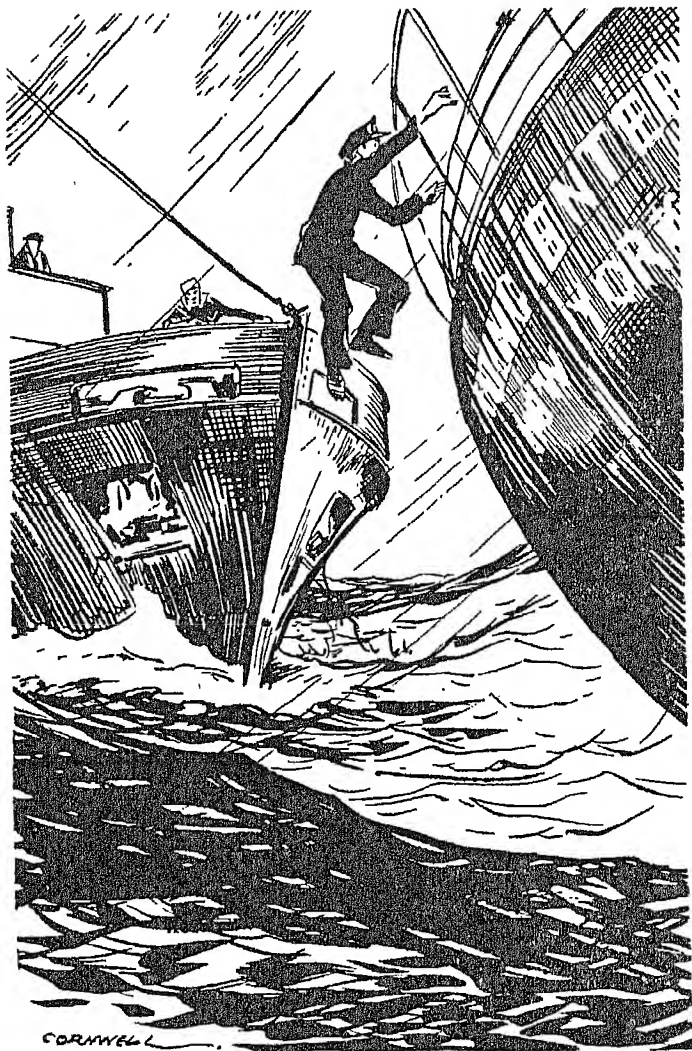
Next day the hurricane still raged, and the list increased. Carlsen decided to call for help. The passengers heard the crackle of the wireless aerial, then the repeated 'three shorts, three longs, three shorts'—the Morse for S O S. Within a short time replies were received from ships in the vicinity and soon the U.S. freighter *Southland* and the transport *General A. W. Greeley* hove in sight. Things were getting desperate on board the *Flying Enterprise*. The list was now nearly fifty degrees, which meant that half of her rudder was clear of the water, and the whole of it far out of the vertical, which

made reliable steering almost impossible—in short the ship was 'out of control'.

With the carpenter the captain made a tour of inspection again and found things were rapidly worsening. To abandon ship was out of the question for all the boats on the port side were useless—either they were filled with water or else floating bottom upwards. Those on the starboard side were too high on the sloping hull to be launched. Added to this the weather was too fierce for open boats to be used. What was he to do? He had the lives of all on board in his keeping, besides a valuable cargo. He could expect no assistance from the waiting ships for they could not approach his ship without running great risks. For so large a ship to be waterlogged and out of control presented a menace to any smaller ship that closed with her.

Carlsen pondered the position for some time. Then he came to a decision. He would tell off the best swimmers among the crew to take charge of a passenger apiece. Then he would signal one of the ships standing-by to come as close as possible, making a lee. The seaman and his passenger would plunge into the sea, to be picked up by the waiting ship. He ordered all to see that their lifebelts were secure, then told them of his decision. By this time most of the passengers were only too glad to get away from the sinking ship. When all was ready he signalled the *Southland* that the men were jumping. The ten passengers went first, each accompanied by a sailor. The sailor could watch the incoming waves and know when best to jump. When the ten passengers had left the ship the *Southland* moved up and threw lifelines to them. Then the crew followed, and at last all were safely picked up, though some members of the crew were in the icy water for over an hour.

Captain Carlsen, true to the traditions of the sea, remained on board. So long as there was the faintest



*The Turmoil was swept near the
Flying Enterprise . . . Dancy leapt . . .*

chance of saving her he would stay. The waiting ships signalled to him 'Jump at once, we'll pick you up'.

Always he sent this reply:

'I'm staying till I'm towed or sunk. Feeling fine.'

The weather still remained stormy, making contact from ship to ship impossible. In 'a land of plenty', so to speak, Carlsen was short of food. The store rooms were full of food but they were inaccessible. In short, he was practically starving. The locker in the chart room had been stocked with fruit juices and sweets against the possibility of the captain being detained on the bridge, and this supply now was all the food he could get. Not much sustenance for a man but it came in very useful under the circumstances.

Next morning the U.S.S. *John W. Weeks* arrived and she managed to heave a shot-line aboard the *Flying Enterprise*. By this means hot meals, cigarettes, and papers were sent aboard. In high spirits Carlsen sent this signal:

'*Many thanks. You fellows are taking a worse beating and are suffering more than I am.*'

News had reached the Admiralty of the drama that was being enacted, and it was decided to send assistance. Lying in Falmouth harbour was the S.S. *Turmoil*. She was the most powerful salvage vessel in the world. Now she was ordered to proceed to the scene of the disaster and endeavour to take the *Flying Enterprise* in tow.

Captain Parker took the *Turmoil* as close as possible to the *Flying Enterprise* and signalled that he was about to try to get a tow rope aboard. There was a heavy swell running—the aftermath of the storm. Four times he passed as close as possible but failed to get the rope across. Kenneth Dancy, the mate of the *Turmoil*, saw that it was well-nigh impossible for one man alone to handle the rope. But how was he to get aboard the wreck? At that moment the *Turmoil* was swept near

to the hull, and in a second Dancy made up his mind. He stepped over the rail of the *Turmoil* and almost before he was aware of it landed on the hull of the *Flying Enterprise*. It was a brave thing to do and even with Captain Carlsen's help it needed all his nerve and the agility common to sailors to enable him to crawl and scramble up until he stood on the sloping deck of the wreck.

'We've got to get that tow rope fixed, captain', said Dancy, 'and the sooner the better. Let the *Turmoil* know we're ready for another try.'

Captain Carlsen tapped out the message. The *Turmoil* replied,

'Stand-by. Line coming.'

The wind was still strong and the two men lashed themselves to the stanchions. This was a check on their freedom of position—they couldn't run after the line—but it gave them two hands to work with. They watched the *Turmoil* anxiously.

'Here it comes', yelled Dancy, and the line fell between the two men. Quickly they grasped it and hauled on foot by foot, till the strong wire tow-line appeared. It certainly was too heavy for one man to handle expeditiously, but the two sailors soon made it fast. They shook hands and Carlsen signalled to the *Turmoil*:

'All fast this end. Go ahead slowly.'

The *Turmoil* steamed slowly ahead, the rope stretched and tautened. Would it take the strain? Nature seemed to decide to help in this attempt. The wind lessened and the sun, which hadn't been seen for a fortnight, came out. With a taut tow-rope and good visibility the *Turmoil* set off for Falmouth. It was no easy task towing a water-logged ship. The rope was 750 yards long and at one end was a ship that had lost most of her buoyancy and lay like a log in the water. Being at the end of so long a tow she was most erratic in her movements, dodging from quarter to quarter willy-nilly. One minute the

rope was taut and the next slack. The *Flying Enterprise* was floating, but for how long nobody could guess. She now listed nearly 80 degrees and was almost on her beam ends. At times her funnel lapped the water, but not being a steam-driven ship the funnel was closed, so no water entered that way.

The two men had the difficult task of keeping the tow-rope from chafing. To ensure this it was necessary to keep it well greased. Unfortunately the grease used in the ship was kept in store rooms, which were now ungetatable. Much to the chagrin of the men they were compelled to use the fresh butter sent across for their consumption. On the tug Captain Parker stationed two men aft with axes. Their duty was to watch the *Flying Enterprise* closely and if she seemed to be acting in a suspicious manner to cut the cables. Should the wreck suddenly disappear below the waves the strain on the rope might endanger the *Turnoil*.

The heroic struggle was soon made known to the world. Carlsen's father, who lived in Copenhagen, flew to London on learning of his son's plight. He sent him an encouraging cable hoping he would get his ship in harbour safely. But alas, once more the old enemy took a hand in the struggle. The wind freshened and rain began to fall. By night it was blowing a gale. Captain Parker signalled that he might have to change course and make for Brest. However with the optimism of sailors, he sent this message to the Mayor of Falmouth. 'Will endeavour to deliver *Flying Enterprise* safely.'

The Mayor replied, sending good wishes and saying he was arranging for a civic reception on their arrival.

The two ships were only sixty miles from 'home' when the weather worsened again. One ray of light was afforded to Captain Carlsen in a message sent by one of the escorting destroyers informing him that the King of Denmark had awarded him the Order of Dannebrog, a high order given for outstanding service.

At midnight the *Turmoil* had to heave-to. When a vessel towing has to do this she is in a very dangerous position. This was made much more dangerous in this case because the ship being towed was water-logged and out of control. Carlsen and Dancy now had the greatest difficulty in getting about their work of keeping the rope in condition. As they watched it it would stiffen with a twang like the twang of the string of a huge guitar. Now that the *Turmoil* was not under way the ship was completely at the mercy of wind and waves. It was indeed a severe test.

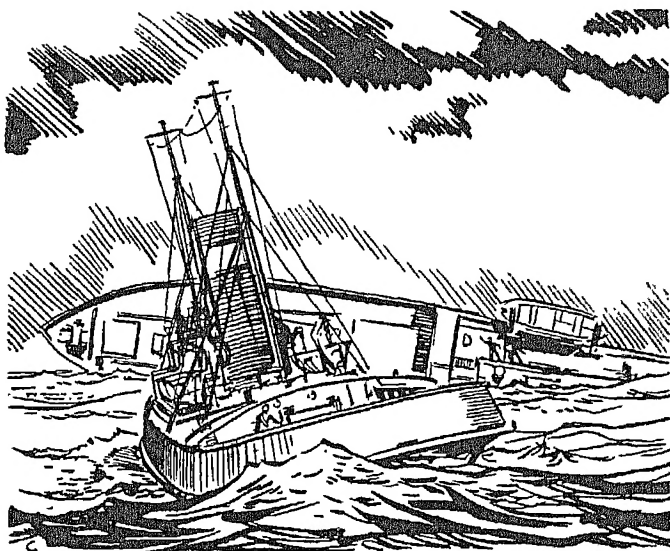
After six hours of constant watching the thing they dreaded happened—the rope snapped with a noise like a pistol shot. At once the ship began to roll, and to the men on board it seemed as if she was going to turn turtle. With life-belts on they waited for the moment when they must leave her. But she managed to survive this disaster. Captain Parker must have guessed the feelings of the two men in her. He signalled:

‘Best thing to do is to wait for daybreak, then I will come in close and try to re-connect. Get some rest if you can.’

At daybreak the *Turmoil* closed with her but all efforts to get another rope on board failed. The ship was drifting rapidly towards the dreaded Manacles Rock. Captain Parker saw this happening and decided to give orders himself. He signalled:

‘Am coming as close as possible and will make a lee. Jump as soon as I’m close and I will pick you up as soon as possible.’

There was nothing else to do, so Carlsen and Dancy adjusted their lifebelts and made their way along the slippery hull to the funnel. Gingerly they clawed along it and waited. It was extremely difficult to stand on this funnel. There was no hold, and both men found their fingers torn and bleeding from scratching and clawing along it. Very soon the *Turmoil* appeared to be coming



At daybreak the *Turmoil* closed with her.

close. She was making as much lee as possible. When she was as close as she could get the two men jumped into the raging sea. Both were good swimmers and not likely to lose their heads under these trying conditions. Lines were thrown from the *Turmoil* and in less than five minutes Carlsen and Dancy were on board. Quickly they changed into dry clothes and Captain Carlsen came on deck. Every captain loves his ship, and his feelings can be imagined as he watched her in her last moments. She was still lying on her side, but her bow was slowly dipping below the surface. The rescue ships moved closer and to put their captains' minds at rest Captain Parker signalled:

'Both men are safe.'

About one-third of her hull was still visible above the waves. Her funnel had disappeared. Carlsen watched with moist eyes. Suddenly the bow rose high in the air as if supplicating heaven, and for hundreds of yards freed cargo spread around—the bulkheads had burst. It was her death struggle. The next minute she suddenly sank below the waves. Another fine ship had found a berth in Davy Jones's Locker.

The rescue ships gathered round and gave her a final salute on their sirens.

The whole town of Falmouth turned out to welcome Carlsen and Dancy when they went ashore to be given a reception by the Mayor and corporation.

